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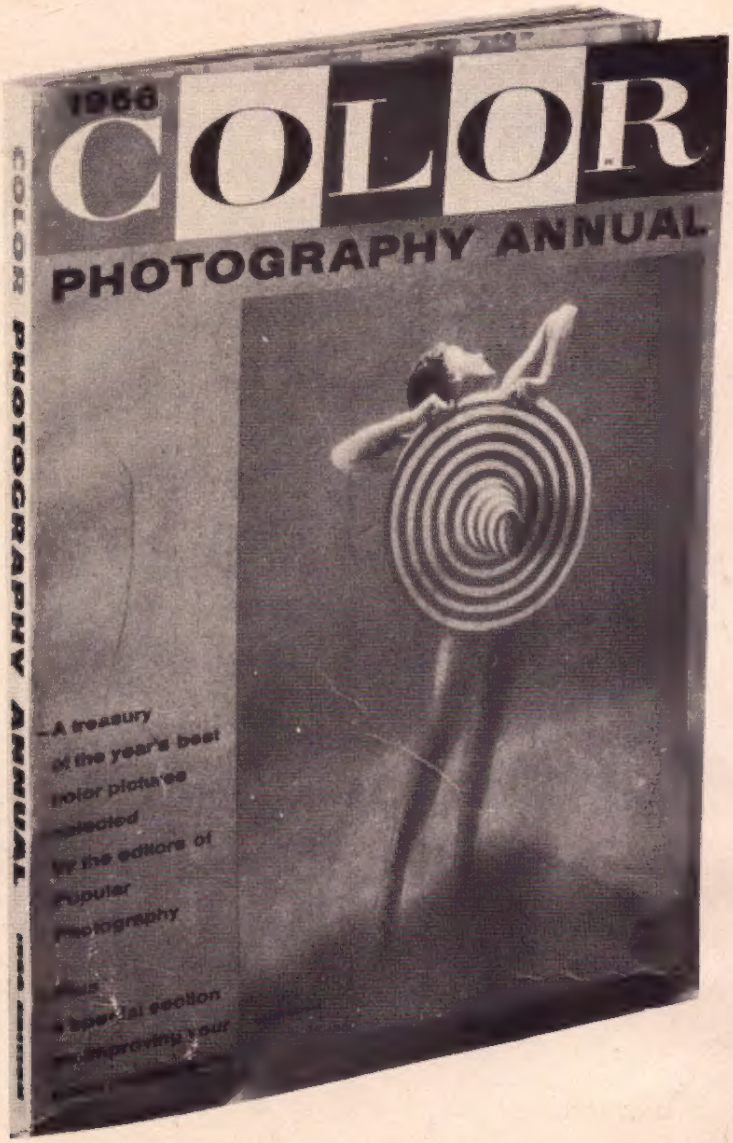

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• In December, 1955, we published a special issue of *Fantastic,* introducing a new kind of fiction. Some of the story titles in that issue are illustrative of what we had in mind: ALL WALLS WERE MIST—*He Walked Through Solid Stone.* HE TOOK WHAT HE WANTED—*No Woman Could Resist Him.* THE MAN WHO READ MINDS—*He Knew Her Most Intimate Thoughts.* BETWEEN TWO WORLDS—*Bank Teller By Day, a Superman By Night.* In essence, these were stories of people with incredible powers. Not super-beings born with these powers, but ordinary people who suddenly found themselves possessed of amazing abilities.

We believed this type of fiction would be accepted and enjoyed by our readers. But we were not prepared for the overwhelmingly enthusiastic reception the issue was accorded. The issue sold out completely and it is now a collector's item.

We think this acceptance sprang from a basic truth. To illustrate— You sit in your local grandstand and watch your favorite baseball team lose a game. And whose fault was it? The manager's, of course. You could have won that game! So you would be interested in reading about a guy who got just that chance and what came of it.

Do you think the President is doing a good job? How would you like to have a crack at running the nation? Take this idea, put it in the hands of a top fiction writer and you have an entertaining story. Did you ever tear your hair when the

girl friend or the boy friend—your husband or your wife —refuses to recognize your sterling worth? How would you like to read about a man who was suddenly given complete power over every other person alive—an overpowering magnetism that made him irresistable? Would you like to own the controlling stock in General Motors? Did you ever yearn to run Trans-World airlines the way it should be run, or be gifted with powers no other mortal ever enjoyed?

That's what this new type of fiction enables you to do as you follow our heroes through hair-raising and glamorous situations in this issue of *Fantastic,* and in the completely new magazine we are bringing out this fall called *Dream World.*

In this issue of *Fantastic,* you will meet Peter Merton whose safe begins erupting money in great gobs—more than he can use in a lifetime. Does he handle it the way you would? Also, there is the MAN WHO KNEW EVERYTHING. By weird chance, a new ray transferred all the information in the encyclopedia smack into his mind. There was nothing he didn't know! But did it make him happy? Read the yarn and find out.

Then there is the man who was a different woman's husband every night. He was looking for a certain woman and that was the only way to find her. He not only succeeded, but he also found out that—well, read the story—AN EYE FOR THE LADIES. Another yarn in the book—THE GIRL FROM BODIES, INC.—is one you won't want to miss. In fact, we're willing to bet you'll read the whole issue from cover to cover in one sitting.

About the new magazine we mentioned—*Dream World*—it's going to follow up right where these special issues of *Fantastic* leave off. We consider your enthusiastic reception of this new type of fiction as a mandate to keep it coming regularly and so we're giving it a magazine of its own!

So watch for *Dream World* and in the meantime, read *Fantastic,* the magazine dedicated to pure ENTERTAINMENT in modern reading. PWF.

Patty put a working stranglehold on Laara but

the Passionate Pitchman

it was Hector, underneath, who got the business.

THE PASSIONATE PITCHMAN

By STEPHEN WILDER

Hector was just another salesman until the gorgeous Miss Laara came along with her Foolproof Method of Procurement. Miss Laara was fascinating. So were her methods. They introduced Hector into a world where inhibitions were unknown. Then the Syndicate moved in. They wanted to know about this procurement business. So will you.

THE large-headed little man cornered Hector Finch after Heck had had his fourth martini at the sales convention.

Heck functioned rather well after four martinis, but he never remembered much afterward. He did remember vaguely, though, that the little man's head seemed too large. Not freakishly so—just somewhat too large. Nor was the man's small stature something a circus sideshow could make money on. The man was almost but not quite five feet tall, Hector Finch judged.

"I want to see you a moment," he told Heck politely. "If I may."

Hector nodded. He waylaid a waiter and short-stopped two brimfull cocktail glasses which had been heading elsewhere.

"Drink?" he asked the little man.

The little man nodded, took one of the glasses and upended it. He had poured the martini—it was a very dry martini—down his throat without swallowing. That, Hector decided, as they found an unoccupied corner of the convention hall in which were displayed the various electronic products of Weatherby, Inc., for which Heck was a salesman, was a considerable feat.

"I've been watching you," the little man said.

"Oh?" It probably meant, Heck told himself, that the little man was an employee-scout for one of Weatherby's competitors. Such scouts oft-

en came to these conventions and had a go at recruiting top-flight sales personnel.

"You're passionate, Hector Finch," the little man said suddenly and unexpectedly.

"I'm which?" Hector asked in surprise.

"Passionate. As a salesman, of course. I wouldn't know about your love life. You truly like to sell things, don't you?"

"Why, yes," Heck said enthusiastically, surprised that he had admitted it. This was, in a way, Hector Finch's secret. Other men loved big sports cars or fishing or hunting or trips to exotic places. Hector Finch's first love was selling. There was something, he always told himself, soul-satisfying in selling someone a product which, while good in its own right, they didn't really need. Something thrilling and ego-boosting . . .

". . . and you're healthy and young and ought to have a life-expectancy of some fifty-odd years after today. Yes, Heck. You're the man we want."

"I'm sorry," Heck said promptly. "But I like my work with Weatherby, Inc. I couldn't possibly—"

"You have, I believe," said the little man with a smile, "a fiancée in the home office of Weatherby, Inc. By name, Patty O'Conner. Irish and—shall we say, tempestuous?"

"What about Patty?" Heck groaned. He thought he knew what was coming.

"Last night, after the first evening of the convention, you and a blonde named—"

"Never mind her name!" wailed Heck, remembering the evening with delight. "How did you know?"

"I said I've been watching you. Now, unless you want the story of you and the blonde woman — very aesthetically pleasing, by the way—to go directly to Miss O'Conner, you must agree to—"

"Anything," Heck said in despair. He loved Patty O'Conner. He wanted to marry Patty, and would. But they weren't married yet. And Heck was a firm believer in wild oats, the more to make marriage lasting and unsullied. He also knew Patty's violent Irish temper.

"Splendid. Incidentally, that bit with the blonde was superb, Heck. I mean, the way you sold yourself. At the beginning she didn't even like you, you know."

Heck beamed. "Seduction, like selling—" he began, then scowled. "Let's just hear your proposition," he said.

"First, a question. What would you say is the chief factor in selling over which the salesman has no control?"

"Location, of c o u r s e," Heck said promptly. "You've got to be where the customer is. You've got to get that old foot in the door, as the expression goes—"

"Precisely. But I can go you one better, Heck. Could you sell bottled water to a thirsting man? a greasy-spoon hamburger to a starving man? life insurance to a man who's just learned he has an incurable disease?"

"You wouldn't need much of a salesman. Anyone could make sales like that."

"Heck, what's a salesman's dream?"

"Walking through walls, I guess. Getting at the customer no matter what."

"But we're grown men. We know that walking through walls is impossible."

"It was only a matter of speaking," said Heck, downing his fifth martini and thinking of Patty. If Patty ever learned about that blonde . . .

"Yes, to be sure. A matter of speaking. But did you ever hear of teleportation?"

"No," said Hector Finch promptly. How his head was whirling!

"Teleportation is instantaneous transport from one position in space, from one location, to another. It needs no time; it negates the dimension of time. Neither time nor space—nor walls, Heck—are a barrier to teleportation. This is what I offer you. With it you can be with the right product at the right place at the right time, and a customer's 'no' and locked door won't mean a thing to you."

"But why—"

"Because of your passion. We want to see what the combination of passionate salesmanship and teleportation can mean on Earth."

"On Earth. Er—"

"No. Certainly not. I'm not from Earth."

"Then—"

"Does it matter? Does it really matter to you? I am from elsewhere. Isn't that enough. Anyway . . ."

"But what do you want me to sell?"

"Anything. Everything."

"I don't—" lamely— "understand."

"Whatever is needed. Wherever it is needed. We've already rented a warehouse in your home city. It's stocked to meet almost any contingency. You sell anything, Heck. You sell it, though,

when and where it is absolutely needed. It's a salesman's paradise: no one can refuse you. No one."

"But — Patty! I'll have to quit Weatherby. And Patty—"

"You're a salesman, aren't you? A passionate salesman? Don't you love Patty? Sell her the idea of coming along as your secretary. You can do it—if anyone can."

"But, but—"

"Be firm, Heck! Believe in yourself. Here." The little man held out something. It was a business card. "Your business card," the little man said. The card said: HECTOR FINCH, Inc. *We Sell Anything, Anywhere, Anytime.* There was an address and a telephone number on the card. Like it or not, unless the little fellow were insane, Heck was in business.

Hector Finch blinked. The little man was gone. Hector spent the next hour wandering around the convention floor, seeking him. He was nowhere. It was as if the floor had swallowed him up. *Maybe I imagined the whole thing,* Heck thought. He'd heard of people getting the DT's, even if they didn't drink excessively . . .

Just then the blonde of last night came undulating across the convention floor. She was a sales analyst for Jason Spooner, Inc., Weatherby's chief competitor. She had a figure which Heck could only regard as fantastic. She looked like a calendar pin-up girl in three dimensions. *Bite-size,* Heck thought. *I mean, life-size. Bite-size and ready to eat. That was an ad . . . Hooo, I'm high. I'm high as the proverbial kite.*

"Heck!" called the blonde. "Heck, darling, I've been looking just all over."

Heck could think of only one thing: Patty. Last night had been a mistake. Patty.

Everything went dark for a split-second.

Heck opened his eyes.

He was standing in a bedroom. A bright moon was riding high, shining through the open window.

It was Patty's bedroom. At least, Heck assumed it was. He had never been there.

The girl sleeping on the bed was Patty.

Not having ever been a movie star, Patty had never told a columnist in what state of dress or undress she slept. Nor had Heck ever asked her. Patty was not a prim girl, but neither was she incontinent, verbally or otherwise.

Standing there on the

threshold of Patty's bedroom in the moonlight, Heck learned how Patty slept.

She slept with a slight, contented smile on her lovely face. She slept with her long Titian hair in careless disarray, framing her heart-shaped head on the pillow. She slept with the light cover thrown back and covering only her left calf.

And she slept, as they say, in her birthday suit.

There were delightful curves. There were delightful hummocks. There were delightful valleys. And highlights and shadows . . .

Heck stood uncertainly on the threshold, gaping. Should he enter the room? Should he beat a hasty and strategic retreat? Should he . . .

He took a hesitant step into the room. His foot struck something. It wasn't much of a sound, but it was enough. Patty was a light sleeper. Her eyes blinked open. She looked at Heck without seeing him. Maybe the moonlight blinded her.

"Get—out!" she yelled.

A man, Heck thought. She sees a man. She doesn't know it's me yet.

She was sitting up now, clutching the cover to her chin. She pointed imperiously at the door. "How dare you come in here? How dare . . ." She stopped. Rage replaced surprise and fear on her face. Patty was definitely no clinging vine type of girl.

She leaped from the bed, draping the light cover over her body. She made straight for Heck, fire in her eyes. "No second-storey man's going to get away with coming in here!" she cried, her Irish wrath rising. Apparently she still hadn't seen Heck's face. He tried to flee, but stumbled over whatever he had stumbled over before.

Patty reached him just as he righted himself. She was a tall girl, tall as Heck. She was not exactly Amazonian, but had a lush, well-built figure. Heck, for his part, was not exactly Herculean. With anger and some little vestige of fear pumping adrenaline through her blood and with health and vigor and half a night's sleep behind her while Heck was still considerably potted, she would have been a good match for him.

But Heck was at a disadvantage. Heck did not want to fight.

She caught his shoulders and turned him around to face her. She butted at him with her head. She kicked him in the shin. She balled her

fists and hit his face. Heck tripped for a third time, and this time he fell down.

In one sweeping motion, the cover trailing like a cape, Patty clawed for the telephone on the dresser and dove down on top of Heck. She sat on his middle and lifted the phone from its cradle and said, her voice surprisingly cool: "Get me the police."

Frantically, Heck clutched at the telephone, depressing the cradle. Patty raised the heavy instrument threateningly.

"Wait!" Heck cried. "It's me—Heck!"

Patty's mouth opened. She didn't say anything, though. Then she looked at Heck and threw her arms around him. "Oh, Hector, Hector, did I hurt you?" she wanted to know.

"You definitely did not hurt me. I tripped, is all."

"I'm sorry, if I had known— Just a minute! Hector Finch, *what are you doing in my bedroom?*"

"I can explain everything," said Heck in a voice which said he could not explain anything at all.

"Well, you had better start explaining." Patty got up, leaving the telephone on the floor near Heck, who was busy rubbing his throbbing jaw.

Just then the telephone rang.

Heck picked up the receiver. "Yes?" he said.

"Are you the party who asked for the police?" the operator demanded.

"No, I'm not," Heck said truthfully.

"Well, someone at that number did. Do you still want the police?"

"No."

"Then why did you—"

"It was the children," Heck blurted. "I'm terribly sorry, operator. You know how children will play with the phone."

"At three o'clock in the morning?" the operator asked.

"They have insomnia," Heck said with inspiration, and hung up.

Patty had adjusted the cover into graceful, toga-like folds. She stood with her hands on her hips. Heck got up and backed slowly toward the door.

"Well?" Patty demanded wrathfully.

"You're dreaming," Heck said. "Don't you realize you're dreaming?"

"Dreaming? But you—"

"Dreaming. Yes, dreaming.

You ought to know me by now, Patty love. Would I barge into your bedroom at three in the morning? Would I?"

"Well, I hadn't thought you would," Patty admitted. "But I certainly don't feel like I'm dreaming. And besides," she went on suspiciously, "a person in a dream never tells the person who is dreaming that she's dreaming. It just isn't done."

"It's done in this dream," "Here, I'll pinch you."

"No, keep away from me!"

"Patty, I'm in Cleveland at the salesman's convention. I called you long distance from Cleveland tonight, remember? So how can I be here? You must have been thinking of me when you went to sleep, so you dreamed . . ."

"Don't be so rational. I want to believe you. But dreams aren't so rational, Heck."

"Get back into bed," Heck commanded. "You'll see you are dreaming. You—you'll be sleeping soundly again in seconds."

"I'm not getting back into anything until I find out if—"

Heck walked toward her. Her bold attack on what she thought had been a prowler was done half in sleep. She was only now coming to full wakefullness. He had to prevent that, or she'd know the truth. Naturally, he couldn't tell her about the little man with the slightly too big head and the something which he called teleportation and which seemed to work.

"Keep away from me, Heck. I'm warning you. We—we're not married yet. If this isn't a dream we won't get married, either."

But boldly Heck advanced on her and with a quick bending and swooping and lifting motion scooped her up in his arms and went with her to the bed. Before he deposited her thereon he kissed her mouth. Her lips were delicious.

"Ooo," she said. "What a dream! What a dream—"

"Go to sleep," Heck ordered. "This obviously can't be anything but a dream. Can it?"

She looked up at him sleepily. Apparently it was working. "N-no, Hector." She looked up at him. "Hector?"

"Yes," he said, backing toward the door, "what is it?"

"Hector, why can't you be —well, assertive, like the man in the dream? The dream Hector."

"I am. I am exactly how I

am. You dream very accurately."

It was a mistake. Her eyes opened wider. She seemed more awake. "But Heck—"

"Sleep," he coaxed. "It's only a dream. Sleep."

She wanted desperately to believe him, and that was a big help. Her eyelids fluttered, grew heavy, closed. She breathed regularly. Heck went to the door.

And tripped a fourth time.

"Hector!" Patty shouted.

He closed the door behind him and ran. He heard her footsteps pounding across the bedroom floor, heard the doorknob being turned. He had to vanish, here in her living room, at once. If he vanished, if the teleportation really worked and took him away instantly, before she could open the door and see him, she would be convinced she had dreamed everything.

He concentrated his will on the teleportation, but made a mistake. He forgot to designate a destination.

Darkness came for a split second.

Then soft light.

A living room—but not Patty's.

A woman screamed, staring at him. The man with her cursed and threw a cocktail glass in an automatic hostile response. It struck Heck's temple and shattered.

The woman was the blonde sales analyst for Jason Spooner. She gaped at Heck open-mouthed. The man seemed familiar. Heck had met him recently, he knew.

Suddenly it came to him. The man was Amos Weatherby of Weatherby, Inc. Met him? He'd known Weatherby for years!

And Heck had seen the living room before. It was the main room of the two-room suite Amos Weatherby had taken at the convention hotel.

"Finch!" Weatherby cried.

Heck stood there, staring blankly. He was near no door. He could not summon his will to vanish via teleportation. He would have to learn how to master that.

"Finch, what are you doing here?"

What Heck was doing there was not at all obvious. But what Amos Weatherby and the blonde had been doing was obvious. Weatherby seemed to be in a rumpled state, hair, clothing, general appearance. The blonde's off-the-shoulder gown was considerably further off the shoulder than it should have been. Cocktail glasses were scattered about. There was a

bottle of champagne in an urn.

Last night she made a play for me, Heck thought. Tonight, the boss. Well, the ex-boss. It came to Heck that it might all be Jason Spooner's idea, and that seemed as good a way out as any. It's like selling, he thought. I sold Patty the idea that she was dreaming, didn't I? Selling was one part luck, one part determination and one part figuring out what the potential customer thought he wanted and tieing that in with what you had to sell.

"Listen, boss," Heck said. "This dame made a play for me last night. Now it's you. I wonder how much Jason Spooner is paying her?"

"That's a lie!" the blonde cried. "He made a drunken pass at me last night and I told him to try again on somebody else. This is his revenge."

"Boss," said Heck, "don't you see? Either Spooner wants to get some trade secrets on next year's models or else he—he wants to put you in a compromising spot. Why—why any minute," Heck improvised, "a photographer might rush in here and start shooting pictures. What a way to discredit Weatherby, Inc! After all, you're a family man, and you can't take—"

Even as Heck spoke, a photographer suddenly came into the room. Through the walls? wondered Heck in dismay. No, he had merely materialized, as Heck had done.

With camera and strobe unit he walked purposefully across the room. "Right here, boss?" he demanded. The others did not know this, but he was addressing Heck. Apparently Heck had summoned him, via teleportation. He was part of Heck's new company, all donated by the man with the big head, like the cards, and the warehouse.

The blonde looked more surprised than anybody. Amos Weatherby had gone white as a sheet. His mouth opened but he couldn't get any words out.

"Scram!" Heck shouted. "Get out of here." The photographer vanished.

"Finch," Amos Weatherby said, mopping his brow, "you had better be able to explain this. All of it."

The blonde, after her first surprise at the photographer, seemed amused. "But does he really?" she demanded. "Do you, Heck?"

The boss-image was very strong in Heck's mind. He'd been an employee of Weatherby, Inc., ever since his two

years of business college. Amos Weatherby was The Boss. You had to obey The Boss. But still, in a way, the blonde was right. Wasn't Heck going into business for himself? Hadn't the arrangements already been made by the little man with the slightly outsized head? But what about the blonde? thought Heck suddenly. How did the blonde know this?

"Well, Finch?" Weatherby asked.

And Heck heard himself saying: "This seems as good a time as any to tell you, boss. I—er—am quitting."

Weatherby looked at him for a moment, then bellowed: "Did some goldarn sales representatives from The Spooner Company offer you some kind of deal? I'll match it, Heck. Plus an additional bonus. Amos Weatherby needs salesmen like you!"

"Thank you, sir, but I'm going into business for myself."

"Yourself? With what for capital?"

The blonde smiled. To Heck it looked like a knowing smile. The blonde knew, all right. She understood everything. "I'm afraid I can't tell you that," Heck said. The blonde took his arm.

"Shall we teleport?" she said.

The last thing Heck saw was Amos Weatherby's sweating face. Then, with the blonde, he plunged into the now familiar blackness.

"But it's still dark," Heck said a few moments later as they continued to travel.

"Sure," came the unseen blonde's voice. "We just haven't gone all the way through."

Something soft nibbled at Heck's face. Nibbled? That wasn't nibbling! he told himself. It was a pair of lips and the lips were kissing him in the utter darkness.

"Ummm," said the blonde between kisses, "if we're going to work together, we might as well have some fun, too."

"But what about Patty?" Heck demanded. While waiting for an answer he explored tentatively then more forcefully with his own lips and hands. After all, the circumstances *were* unusual.

"Patty?" asked the blonde dreamily. "Paa-tii? Oh, yes, the girl friend. Well, just you bring her along to work for us if you want, as a secretary or clerk or something."

"For—us?" Heck asked.

"Us, of course. I'm part of

Hector Finch. We Sell Anything."

"What part?" Heck asked suspiciously.

"Don't say it like that, lover. It was Baldid's idea."

"Who the hell's Baldid?"

"Little man? Big head?"

"Go ahead," said Heck resignedly.

"I'm to be your procurement agent, is all."

"Procurer," said Heck, "of what?"

"Procurement agent, I said. What do you think a procurement agent does? He gets things. You sell them, I'll get them. O.K.?"

"If Mr. Baldid said so, I guess it's O.K."

"Splendid," came the voice of the blonde in utter darkness. She was very close. Heck could smell the scent of her perfume. He felt the faint brushing of her blonde hair against his face as she moved her head in the darkness. "Now, do you want to go back and get a hotel room, or sleep here?" she asked Heck matter-of-factly.

"Well, to tell you the truth—"

"Why bother to be conventional, Heck? Besides, those are just the conventions of *your world* which are holding you back. Now, on *my* world—"

"You stay here," Heck said. "Wherever here is. I'm going back home. I'll see you at the new office tomorrow. Er—you know the address?"

"I ought to. I picked the place out for Baldid."

"Well, goodbye," Heck said, and teleported to his bachelor apartment in Metropolitan City, about half a mile from where Patty lived. Conventions, he thought. It was always something. He didn't mean the conventions which had stopped him from doing what the eager blonde wanted to do because he was engaged to Patty. He meant sales conventions. If all this had happened at anything but a sales convention, Heck would have been too incredulous to go ahead with his plans to start the new business. But at a sales convention? Anything and everything could happen at a sales convention. . . .

Heck drifted off to sleep and dreamed that Patty and Baldid, secret lovers, were conspiring against him.

He was at the new office building at nine o'clock promptly. He should have felt sleepy, but did not. He was raring to go.

The building was seven storeys high. Heck had expected a dilapidated ware-

house and a dingy suite of offices above it. What he saw was a gleaming glass-walled new office building in one of the best sections of town. A sign in raised metal-on-metal bank-style letters proclaimed the edifice to be the *Finch Building*. And that, Heck told himself in amazement, was more than either Amos Weatherby or Jason Spooner had.

The doorman smiled and tipped his hat. At first Heck, who smiled back a little self-consciously, did not know how the maroon-uniformed doorman knew him. But then he saw a big full-color portrait of himself hanging just to the left of the bank of elevators. Apparently the blonde had found it somewhere, or had had it made from a snapshot. The blonde thought of everything.

Heck got into the elevator. It was crowded with white-collar workers all of whom, Heck realized with a start, worked for him. They'd been talking animatedly when he entered the car, but the talk settled quickly into nervous silence. After all, weren't they in the presence of The Boss?

When the elevator got to the top floor and when the last of the other passengers got off, Heck stepped out on a plush red carpet and across it through a gate and past a row of smiling secretaries to an opaque-glass-walled suite of offices marked with the legend: *Executive Offices.*

There must have been half a dozen secretaries and clerks in the large ante-room. All were busy. All were gorgeous. If the blonde was responsible for hiring them, the blonde had taste. And obviously wasn't the jealous type. Or perhaps, Heck thought, Baldid had done the hiring. Or perhaps the girls just came with the building. Were they Earth girls? wondered Heck, or girls from the blonde's world? He found himself sighing with contentment. If they all had a collective moral sense the equal of the blonde's . . . But what am I thinking? There's Patty. Isn't there?

". . . waiting for you," a voice said.

"Er, what was that?" Heck realized that the secretary closest to the door leading to the Executive Offices had spoken to him.

"I said, sir, there is a Miss O'Conner waiting for you in your office."

Patty, Heck thought. He gulped. How had Patty learned of his new business

so quickly? He was going to tell her, of course, but not immediately. He needed time to think. Unprepared, how could you explain a setup like this to a girl like Patty?

"...has called twice," the secretary was saying.

"I—uh—whom did you say has called twice?"

"Miss Laara, sir. The procurement agent."

"Ah, yes. Miss Laara. I'd better see her. At once. Yes. Yes, at once. Don't tell Miss O'Conner..."

Just then the door to the Executive Offices opened. An angry Patty stood there, hands on hips. "Don't tell Miss O'Conner what?" she demanded. "Heck, are you trying to avoid me?"

"Why, no, sweetheart. Whatever—"

Then Patty's face changed. The anger and the certainty were replaced by a small-girl look of surprise and awe. "Heck," she said in a soft voice, "what is all this? What has happened to you? How—how can you afford a setup that could bankrupt Amos Weatherby?"

"I can explain everything," Heck said, realizing how ridiculous and incriminating the words sound. "No, I mean it, I can." Of course he could. But whether she believed or not was another story.

"Now?" Patty asked.

"Not now. Right now I'm busy."

Patty had a new expression on her face. Hurt look. "At least give me some idea," she pleaded.

Heck stared at her blankly. There was nothing he could say. She would never believe his story about Mr. Baldid. Who in his right mind would? "I—I saved up!" he said, blurting the words.

"Saved up? If you'd been saving half your paycheck since I met you you couldn't have put a down payment on just the furniture in this one room. Heck! Heck, you're lying to me!"

He didn't deny it. He stared at Patty and shrugged his shoulders and adjusted his tie and teleported. The last thing he saw was Patty's very angry face....

Heck re-materialized in the Procurement Office, or rather in the waiting room of the procurement office. He looked around. He shuddered. He wanted to run.

The faces. You didn't have to study the WANTED posters in the post offices to recognize them. They were all of a type—and the type belong-

ed on wanted posters. They were hard faces, brutal faces, cynical faces. They went with big, powerful bodies and heavily-padded, loud-styled clothing. They went with suspicious jacket-bulges and unreadable expressions. They went with organized crime.

The secretary, a very small brunette in a low-cut dress, did not seem to mind. In fact, she seemed a shade disappointed when Heck's comparatively small form pushed its way through to her desk. "There's something?" she said, then gave Heck a closer scrutiny. "Mr. Finch! I'm sorry, sir. I didn't recognize you."

"Is Miss Laara in?"

"Yes, sir. Of course. Interviewing, sir."

"For what?"

The receptionist stared at him in surprise. "For the procurement staff, naturally. Shall I tell Miss Laara you're here?"

"No. I'll go right in, thanks."

And Heck went to the door, and opened it.

"...ten percent of the price received for all material procured by you," Miss Laara, her blonde hair in an upsweep and harlequin glasses perched on her pretty nose, was saying.

She looked up. "Oh, hi. Hi, Heck."

Heck grunted, sat down in the one empty chair. The second visitor's chair in the room was well-filled by the enormous bulk of one of the hoodlum types being interviewed for the procurement staff. "Gee, lady," he said. "I dunno. Ten percent ain't so hot. If we was to sell to a fence we could figure on maybe thirty percent of the value of the merchandise."

"Sure, but working with a fence is catch as catch can. I guarantee you a steady market. Besides, you will also be guaranteed a capture-proof method of procurement. I already explained that to you."

"Prohibition was never like this," said the thug.

"Well, what do you say, my man? Come, come. There are others. If you don't want—"

"Naw, I didn't say that. I guess I'll take the deal. Only, lemme see that trick again. Walk through that wall."

"I already told you it wasn't really walking through walls. It is teleporting."

"Teleporting, shmeleporting. Gimme the gadget."

"There is no gadget. You are now working for us. You can teleport. And your specialty, Mr. Manetti—?"

"Tires. Automobile tires." Manetti walked toward the wall, chuckling happily.

"We'll expect a shipment today."

"Today? But—"

"You can teleport it, remember?"

Manetti nodded his head, got halfway to the wall and disappeared.

Laara flashed a smile. "How'm I doing, Heck?"

"I don't know. I just don't know."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Laara asked in a hurt voice. "By noon I ought to have the whole procurement force, and you say—"

"Crooks. Gangsters."

"What did you expect, a staff of Little Lord Fauntleroys? After all, if they have to burgle—"

"Burgle!"

"Of course. We don't have any working capital. How do you expect to get any merchandise to sell? We burgle it—but safely—via teleportation."

"That's against the law," Heck said.

Laara looked at him blankly. "Is it? Do you really care?"

"I really, definitely, truly care! Call off your procurement force, Laara. That's an order. Go out and get us some money."

"Where?"

"Why, from Baldid, of course."

"But Baldid doesn't have any money."

"No? No money?" Heck said in alarm.

"But I can get some. I can rob a bank via teleportation. Shall I go now?"

"No." Heck cried. "Don't do that. I didn't mean like that. Dismiss the staff. Forget the whole thing. I'll get a job. Maybe Jason Spooner will hire me. But I won't be a party to any wholesale burglaries."

"Very well," the blonde Laara said. "If that's what you want. But first I'd like to point out we have a staff of over five hundred in this building. They've all been here an hour or so. They'll all demand at least a day's pay, if you let them go. Some of them will demand two weeks pay and the courts might decide they're entitled to it. Do you imagine—*can* you imagine—where that would put you? In debt for life, Hector Finch, unless you go through with our business arrangements."

"Crooks and all?" Heck said in despair.

"I'm handling this. Crooks

and all, is that clear?" The blonde stared at him defiantly. Defiantly? he wondered. But defiantly meant she was trying to defy him. It wasn't that way at all. If there was any defying that had to be done, it would be on Heck's part. The blonde was in the driver's seat. Heck wondered: who really runs *Hector Finch. We Sell Anything?* It certainly wasn't Heck.

Gangsters, he thought. Criminals. And how many robberies a day? He shuddered, and teleported.

He blinked.

He stared.

He gaped.

He had begun to materialize in a locker room. He had of course been in locker rooms before. But never in ladies' locker rooms.

And this was very definitely a ladies' locker room.

Heck heard the hiss and roar of showers, heard the talk of many girls. He saw them, too, in the aisles between the lockers. Some were dressed in mufti. Some were dressed in a kind of uniform with the letters HF stitched across the left breast. Some were dressed in fractions of each, or either. Some were in undies. Some were in towels. Some were not dressed at all. And every girl in the locker room was a beauty, sleek and well-formed and lovely to look at except that with all of them there, Heck thought, it was something like a man dying of thirst in the middle of the Sahara being thrust suddenly head first into a vat of beer. He'd want to drink a lot but he couldn't drink that fast and if he didn't watch out he might even go—in seconds—from dying of thirst to drowning.

Heck flushed, and decided to teleport. Before he could, however, a woman wearing a towel and a lot of wet skin grabbed his arm. "Stick around, honey," she said. "You're the boss, aren't you?"

"That's right, Miss. I—"

"You like the new uniform?"

"Well, I—"

"Georgette!" called the woman, who seemed to be several years older than the others and reminded Heck of his impression of what a madam ought to be like.

A strawberry blonde came over in the HF uniform and slowly pirouetted for Heck. The uniform was maroon and silver, with a tight clinging bodice and tapered slacks that fit her buttocks and legs like

sun-tan oil. Heck gaped.

"Like it?" the strawberry blonde asked.

"That's enough, Georgette," the older woman said. "This is the boss."

Georgette went away, wagging an acre of pulchritude.

"What are you all going to be," Heck asked, "elevator operators?"

"Elevator operators?" repeated the woman, and laughed. It was a loud, unrestrained sort of laugh, but somehow not uncouth—exactly what Heck would have expected if the woman had been what Heck thought the woman looked like. "Dear me, no. Elevator operators!" And she went off into a second fit of laughter.

"Then what?"

"We're the sales staff, of course."

"Sales?" Blankly.

"Sales. It's Miss Laara's feeling that a sales staff ought to be expert at selling."

"Obviously," Heck said.

"Look at these girls! Can they sell, d'you think? In those uniforms they could sell Union Station to the police chief and make it stick."

"But their experience—"

"They're all experienced. They're chorus girls or burlesque girls or party girls or pr—"

"That's enough!" Heck cried. "You've made your point."

"Then all I want to know is, do you approve of the uniform or don't you approve of the uniform?"

Heck couldn't think. Everybody was running *Hector Finch* but Hector Finch. He took one more look around the locker room. Most of the girls were in their uniforms now. They had not minded Heck's being there. Why should they? They were all used to that sort of thing.

Heck should have been happy. Access to this room alone might have been worth five years of a healthy young bachelor's life. But he wasn't happy at all. Yesterday the ace salesman of a big electronics outfit. An ace salesman, who loved selling, perfectly, splendidly, magnificently adjusted. Today, the owner of a huge—and illegally functioning or soon to be illegally functioning — company. Well, the so-called owner. The owner in name only.

Because he hadn't made one decision. . . .

"Excuse me," a voice said timidly. "I was told I might find Hector Finch here. Is Hector—" The voice trailed

off. It was Patty's voice and now Patty saw Heck, sitting apparently unconcernedly, among all the uniformed and ununiformed and partially uniformed beauties.

"Heck!" she cried. "You come out of there! You come with me this minute." But then she looked at his face, saw the worry, the indecision, the confusion. "Heck," she said, her voice softening. "Heck, you poor guy. You look so befuddled. You come on with me, Heck."

Mechanically, he went. Laara ran procurement. The madam-like woman ran selling. Patty ran Heck. He was one hell of an executive.

They ran smack into their first serious trouble three days after the company began to function.

In those three days, Heck almost succeeded in turning his own head. His job apparently consisted of signing a few routine interoffice memorandums, making a daily tour of inspection, spending as much time as he wanted with the sales force, arbitrating disputes between some of the more tempestuous beauties either of the sales force or the secretarial staff, and trying to convince Patty, who had come that first day because she had seen an ad Laara had placed in the papers in Heck's name, that everything was going to be all right. He never did actually get right down to it and tell Patty the truth, but he didn't have to. On the second day, Laara told her. And, coming from Laara, not Heck, Patty believed every word.

And they were making money, as the expression goes, hand over fist. The first day, four hundred thousand in net profits. The second day, six hundred and fifty thousand. The third day, just short of a million. In three years at this rate, Heck thought, he'd be a billionaire. So why worry about little details like how the procurement force got merchandise to sell or how the sales force did the selling?

Then on the third day, while Heck was settling a petty dispute between Georgette and another saleswoman named Marcia, he got an intercom call from Laara.

"Heck, you'd better come down to my office. There seems to be some trouble."

"What kind of trouble?"

"Procurement t r o u b l e. Hurry up, before the police get here."

The word police sent Heck teleporting instantly. To hell

with elevators and corridors, he told himself. To hell with a billion dollars. Police... And if they were caught, they were caught with a warehouse full of stolen goods.

Heck materialized in the procurement office. A thug sat there nibbling at a finger half the size of a baseball bat. Laara was looking at him angrily. The thug resembled Manetti, but seemed bigger if not tougher. They all seemed to resemble Manetti.

"This is Mr. Fanetti," Laara said. "Mr. Fanetti, Mr. Finch."

"You mean, The Boss?" Fanetti said in a deep but awed voice. "A time like this I got to meet the boss? Jeez, boss, I'm sorry." For all his size and bulk, Fanetti cowered in front of Heck. He looked as if he expected Heck to hit him.

"What did Fanetti do?" Heck asked Laara. He was surprised that he could be so calm. It was Fanetti's attitude, he supposed. Fanetti's awe and respect did things for his ego.

"Let Fanetti tell it," Laara said, and Fanetti began:

"I work out of wholesale liquor, boss. Man, for three days it's just like prohibition all over again. Hell, I was a punk kid then, but I remember. You know? Honest, boss, I didn't—"

"Get to the point, Fanetti," Heck said curtly.

"We had this deal. The National Liquor Warehouse is in this city, you know?"

"That was Fanetti's first mistake," Laara cut in. "I told them. I tried to drum it into their stupid heads. It would be better to work other cities. With teleportation at their fingertips, what's the difference how far they went? They could have crossed oceans in split-seconds. But Fanetti couldn't get that through his thick skull."

Heck stood up impatiently, lighting a cigarette. Fanetti misunderstood the gesture, and raised a hand in front of his face to ward off an expected blow.

"Go ahead, for crying out loud," Heck said.

"Well, anyhow," Fanetti continued, "I been heisting Scotch and bourbon at the National Warehouse and doing great on my ten percent, boss. When, all of a sudden, along comes Scarface Willy."

"Scarface Willy?" repeated Heck. He smiled: it sounded too much like a TV crime melodrama for him to do otherwise. Then he remembered what Laara had said

about the police. He stopped smiling. "Who is Scarface Willy?" he asked Fanetti.

"Just the kingpin bootlegger in Metropolitan City during prohibition, that's all!" Fanetti cried in a hoarse voice.

"But that was over twenty years ago," Heck protested.

Laara pointed out: "Don't you think Scarface Willy has to go on making a living?"

Fanetti said: "Scarface Willy is real mad, see? After prohibition, Scarface gets into the protection racket. He knows the liquor trade, see? He knows the liquor people. So he starts protecting all the liquor distributors in Metropolitan City, back in the thirties. And ever since."

"Including National, from which Fanetti has been taking out several hundred cases of liquor a day."

"Including National," Heck groaned.

"Today," Fanetti finished, "Scarface Willy meets me there. He's mad. He's boiling, lemme tell you. Fanetti, he tells me, you're looking to get killed. Fanetti, you're as good as dead if you take as much as another shot of liquor from National. Fanetti, he screams, I get fifty thousand bucks a year in protection money from National Liquor. How in hell can I protect National, he hollers, from guys like you who just make the goddamn liquor disappear? Fanetti, if you ever do that again, I will have you hit in the head and put in a cement overcoat and dropped in the river. So I tell him I ain't the boss and this gets Scarface Willy mad, too. He figures he is the boss of liquor in this city. He wants I should take him to you. As we have strict orders from Miss Laara that nobody but ourselves is to ever get telewachamacallited, I tell him he will have to come here on shank's mare. So, he's coming."

"Scarface Willy?" said Heck.

"Scarface Willy," said Laara, looking worried for almost the first time since Heck had known her.

"But what about the cops?" Heck asked.

"What can you tell Scarface Willy? That we'll stop? If we do, and he gets wise to the rest of our business, he can blackmail us for every cent we're worth. Or that we'll give him a cut? But then he'll want a cut of everything."

"You said the cops."

"That's after you kick Scarface Willy out on his rear end. He's got political connec-

tions in this city. Doubtless he'll use them."

"I'm going to do what to Scarface Willy?"

Fanetti got up and came over and pounded Heck's back with a hand like a punch-press. "You can do it, boss," he said. "I know you can do it."

Just then the intercom buzzed and a voice said: "This is Main Floor Reception, Miss Laara. A Mr. William Talese has just reached the elevator and is now going up. He has an appointment with—"

"I know who he has an appointment with," said Laara, and cut the connection.

"With me?" Heck asked glumly.

"Not yet with you. Want to soften him up first. Remember Georgette?"

Indeed he did. "Georgette?" he said. "Oh, yes."

"Mr. Scarface Willy Talese's first appointment is with Sales. With Georgette, to be precise. So, we wait an hour or so and see how much Georgette can soften him up. Then we bring him upstairs to see you. How does it sound?"

"Great, lady," Fanetti said, going over to Laara and raising the flat of his hand to repeat the optimistic thumping he had administered to Heck's spine.

"If you use that thing on me, Fanetti," Laura shouted, "you're finished here."

"Aw, lady," Fanetti said, looking at his hand. In repose his hand was not very big. In repose it looked only half the size of a whale's fluke.

They waited. For Heck, time crawled. Not that he was in a hurry to see Scarface Willy. But time crawled agonizingly because he didn't know exactly what Willy wanted and knew he'd have to wait a while before he found out. It was hard to believe that three days ago he was a salesman in love with his work and in love with his girl. Now he wasn't a salesman any longer although that had seemed to be Baldid's original idea. Now he hardly had time for his girl . . .

Buzz went the intercom. "Yes?" said Laara.

"This is Sophie," said a voice. Sophie was the madam-like woman. "Mr. Talese was here."

"What do you mean, *was* there?" asked Laara.

"Because he's come and gone. He wouldn't even look at Georgette. He had too much business on his mind to

think of dames, he said. He meant it, Miss Laara. He said the only kind of dames he really liked, anyhow, was tall redheads with plenty of Irish in them. So—" here Sophie's voice suddenly took on a foxy quality— "I sent him right up to Mr. Finch's office."

"Mr. Finch's office?" repeated Laara. "But he was supposed to see us right here in Procurement. After all, it's a procurement problem."

"But a tall redhead with plenty of Irish in her!" cried Sophie with professional enthusiasm. "Don't you see?"

"Patty!" shouted Heck in dismay. "You want Patty to try what Georgette—"

He forgot all about teleportation. He began to run from the room.

"Stop him, Fanetti!" Laara cried. "Stop him!"

"The Boss?" Fanetti asked in an awed voice.

"You're in Procurement. You work for me. I'm The Boss. Stop him. Stop him or you're fired."

Fanetti let out what sounded almost like a sob, but rushed across the room at Heck. They came together and went down in a heap and in a moment Fanetti sat on Heck, pinning him to the floor.

"If you don't get the hell up, you oaf, you're fired," Heck said.

"And you're fired if you don't stay where you are," Laara said.

Clearly, Fanetti did not know what to do. He sat there looking sadly at Heck, looking sadly at Laara.

Then Heck remembered.

Heck teleported.

But Fanetti clung to him.

"I don't get you dames a-tall," Scarface Willy Talese said. "The skinny little strawberry blonde was all for it. I figure, that's the general idea. But I don't go for the skinny little strawberry blonde. You know? Some dames you go for and some dames you don't."

"I wouldn't know," Patty said coldly.

"Well, I go for you, baby," Scarface Willy said. "I go for you in a big way. And what Willy Talese goes for, he gets."

Patty stood behind the desk, her balance forward on the balls of her feet, her hands tensed on the edge of the desk, ready to run either way. Scarface Willy, a surprisingly small and dapper-looking middle-aged gentleman with only a very small scar pulling down the outside

corner of his left eye and a custom-tailored outfit which must have cost him a cool three hundred dollars, stood in front of the desk. He went one way. Patty went the other way. Scarface Willy lunged over the desk. Patty hit him with a paperweight but he bobbed like a clever boxer and it only grazed his forehead. "Irish," he said. "I like your Irish, girl. I like everything about you."

"I—I'll bop you again," Patty vowed. "Or else I'll scream. Yes, I'll scream."

Willy was confused. Downstairs they hadn't behaved this way at all. The other girl was nothing like this. The other girl was all eagerness. It was always that way, though. The good things came tough.

Willy lunged a second time. Patty swung and missed him with the paperweight.

Heck and Fanetti materialized on the desktop. Fanetti was still sitting on Heck.

"Get off me," Heck said.

Fanetti got off, and vaulted off the desk.

"Fanetti, you!" screamed the surprised Scarface Willy.

"Aw, Boss," Fanetti bleated. It seemed he had a passion for calling people boss.

Scarface Willy clawed at the lapel of his custom-tailored suit. He withdrew a snub-nosed wide-bored automatic and made a fanning motion with it around the room. "All right," he said. "All right. Talese's had enough. Talese don't get treated like this. Talese gives protection, see? When Talese gives protection, he wants it to stick. See? You, Fanetti!"

"Yeah, Boss?"

"Sit on that guy again. You did that real good."

Fanetti looked at Scarface Willy. He looked at Heck. He shifted his feet uncomfortably.

"Because I'm getting out of here," Scarface Willy said. "With the dame. I don't like this joint. Dames who throw themselves at you. Dames who don't. People who pop up out of nowheres. A madam who calls herself a sales director. Maybe Red here can straighten me out. Can't you, Red?"

"I won't tell you a thing," Patty told him coldly.

Scarface Willy shrugged "Not here, you won't. At my place. Are you going to sit on him, Fanetti?"

"N-no," Fanetti said after a while. The word was defiant. The tone was not.

Scarface Willy shrugged again. "I'll remember that,

Fanetti. When the time comes. You!" Waving the gun.

"Me?" said Heck.

"Yeah, you. Come with me. We're going downstairs together. You and me and Red here. I'll have the gun in my pocket. You'll escort me to the street. Me and Red."

"You wouldn't dare kill us."

"Who said anything about killing you? Think I wanta face a murder-one rap? Fanetti!"

"Yeah?" Fanetti said.

"Come here."

Fanetti walked slowly in front of Scarface Willy. Then Fanetti saw the look on Willy's face and began to back away. He had a look of fascinated horror on his face. Coldly, contemptuously, Willy reached into his jacket again. He took out a long, barrel-tubed contraption and slowly screwed it on the end of his automatic. Fanetti backed away faster. He opened his mouth to say no.

Before he could say it, though, Scarface Willy shot him twice, once in the meaty part of each thigh. The silencer muffled the twin explosions almost completely. Fanetti crumpled in pain, writhing on the floor. Willy unscrewed the silencer from his gun and put it away. "Shall we go?" he said.

With a numbness clouding his mind and making coherent thought all but impossible, Heck walked in front of Scarface Willy and Patty to the office door. He jerked the door open and heard them walking behind him. He also heard Fanetti's moan. He told the receptionist:

"You'd better get a doctor, quick as you can."

"A doctor?"

Heck jerked a thumb behind him. "In there."

Then Scarface Willy came out, with Patty. She was walking before him. Unless you were looking for it, you did not see the bulge of the automatic which he held in his pocket. But if you were looking for it, as Heck was, it seemed as big as a sixteen-inch naval gun.

The pretty female elevator operator smiled and said a few things and obviously expected Heck to flirt with her as the car went down. Heck maintained a white-faced silence.

"Say, Mr. Finch, is anything the matter? You don't look so good."

Scarface Willy grunted a barely audible warning. Patty let out a sigh. "Work-

ing too hard, I guess," Heck told the elevator operator.

"Well, you're white as a sheet. Why don't you go down to the beach and get yourself a good sunburn one of these days."

"Maybe I will," Heck said automatically as the elevator reached ground level. He got out. The others got out behind him.

"The street," Scarface Willy said.

They went outside. A snarl of traffic passed sluggishly in the street. Horns tooted. Someone, probably a taxi driver, yelled. I can get away right now, Heck thought. The street was crowded. He could slip away. Scarface Willy wouldn't dare shoot. But Scarface Willy didn't want him. Scarface Willy wanted Patty....

"Listen," Willy said. "The girl goes with me. You get it? She goes, and you get time to think. Say, twenty-four hours?"

"To think about what?"

"Don't listen to him, Heck, whatever it is!" Patty said bravely.

"I'm cutting myself in, Finch. To think about—say, fifty percent?"

"Fifty percent!" gasped Heck.

Willy squeezed Patty's arm. Patty winced. "Fifty percent, bucko," said Willy. "A fifty-fifty split. Don't tell me now. I want you to think about it."

A long black car untangled itself from the steady snarling stream of traffic and cruised over to the curb. The chauffeur leaned back, opening the rear door. Pushing Patty ahead of him, Scarface Willy climbed in.

"What about me?" Heck wanted to know. "You can't take her without—"

"You stay where you are, bucko. I already told you."

The door slammed. Heck clawed at the handle. "Wait! Wait!" he cried. The car sped from the curb, almost bowling Heck over. "Help!" he shouted. "Help! Kidnapper!"

Already the car was out of sight in traffic. And Heck hadn't even looked at the license number. A curious crowd had gathered around him. Someone pushed his way through. A cop. Eying Heck speculatively. "Well," he said, "and what's this racket about a kidnapper?"

"Nothing," Heck said. "Nothing." If the cops came in on this, there was no telling what might happen to Patty. The mental numbness enveloping him again, Heck went back into the building.

"Maybe you'd better send for Baldid," Heck told Laara. "Because if anybody can help us, it's Baldid."

"But you're wrong, Heck," the blonde said promptly. "You couldn't be wronger. Baldid is a successful businessman, is all. He wouldn't know how to deal with this situation at all."

"Me," Heck groaned, "I'm not even a successful businessman. I'm nothing. I'm nobody."

"You're Hector Finch. Don't ever say you're nobody."

"That," said Heck resignedly, "is saying the same thing."

"Are you just going to sit here brooding while that man has your fiancée?" For the first time, as if danger were the impetus, Laara readily admitted that Patty was Heck's fiancée.

"I'm thinking. I'm trying to think. Listen, Laara, in order to teleport some place, do you have to know precisely where?"

"No. But you need a general idea."

"Just knowing that it's Scarface Willy's hideout or headquarters or whatever it is—would that be enough?"

Laara shook her head.

"Wait a minute!" Heck cried. "The doc's still here with Mr. Fanetti, isn't he?"

"I think so. They have to do something for Fanetti's legs before he can be moved."

"Poor Fanetti," Heck said, and took Laara's hand, and teleported from her office to his.

Fanetti was sitting up. His trousers had been removed and a sheet was draped over his legs. His face had an unhealthy pallor, as if he'd lost too much blood and needed a transfusion—which probably was the case.

"How are you, Fanetti?" Heck said.

Fanetti shrugged. "I been hit before," he told them, a little proudly.

The doctor said: "I've sent for an ambulance. This man needs three or four days in the hospital. He'll be all right after that."

"Fanetti, listen," Heck pleaded. "I need help. I need to know where Scarface Willy hangs out. I need to know badly."

"He took the big redheaded cutie?"

"Yes," said Laara.

"Jeez," said Fanetti in awe. "Kidnapping. That Scarface Willy'll do anything."

"You've got to tell me where I can find him."

"I'd like to, Boss. I'm on

your side. You ought to know that."

"Well?"

"But I don't know!"

"You don't know?" Heck repeated the words in a shocked voice. Getting Fanetti to co-operate, he had thought, would be the toughest nut to crack.

"Nobody does, but maybe an inside few who got to. Willy's taking no chances. Hell, he's up on history. He knows what happened to guys like Dutch Schultz right in their own hangouts. So, he don't take no chances. I'm sorry, Boss."

"But there must be somebody can tell me."

Fanetti scowled. "I tell you what," he said. "The racetrack."

"The racketrack?"

"Yeah. A lot of Willy's friends hang out in the Clubhouse. You can't miss 'em. Especially on a weekday like this, they almost got the Clubhouse all to themselves. The suckers with the little bets hang out near the rail, but it's the Clubhouse for Willy's friends. You see . . ."

But Fanetti found himself talking to the doctor and to Laara. Heck had teleported.

. . . Out of blackness.

He heard a bugle call. He was high up over a grandstand in a terraced room almost the size of an auditorium. It was set up like an open-air restaurant with only one side open. That side faced the race track.

"They're coming from the paddock for the fifth race," a loudspeaker voice announced. "This is the forty-fourth running of the Belvedere Handicap for four-year-olds. Purse, fifty thousand dollars."

There was a bar and all but two or three of the patrons of the Clubhouse were clustered around it with drinks. Then, one by one, they drifted over to the barrier which overlooked the grandstand, the rail-enclosed viewing area, and the turf.

"Excuse me," Heck began. "I'm looking—"

But they went right by him. They were interested in the horses now coming to the post for the forty-fourth running of the Belvedere Handicap. They hardly saw Heck at all.

"Sulatan's Lady," said one. "I got a hun'red ona nose."

"Sultan's, stupid. Can't you talk English?"

"Miramar," insisted another with smug confidence.

A bell clanged. A shout went up from below. The horses began to run.

"Excuse me," Heck said.

But all eyes might as well have been glued to the turf. In spite of himself, Heck watched the brief pounding flurry of the horses' hooves. When it was over and the crowd below settled back into anxious whispering, a loudspeaker voice said:

"There is a photo-finish in the fifth race, ladies and gentlemen, with Sultan's Lady and Miramar neck and neck."

"Sultan's Lady," said one of the Clubhouse patrons.

"Miramar!" hotly contested the other.

"Gentlemen," said Heck.

They all ignored him.

Heck took a deep breath and shouted at the top of his voice: "Mr. William Talese!"

Two or three of the men turned to him for the first time. "Hey, kiddo. You mean Scarface Willy? So what about him?" one of them demanded.

"I'm looking for him."

"He's looking for him," one of the thugs repeated in an amused tone.

"We, er, had a business deal," Heck improvised.

"Yeah? What kind of a business deal?"

"I am not at liberty to divulge that. But it will mean millions of dollars to Mr. Talese and some of his chosen friends. Mr. Talese said to meet him right here, but I haven't got all day. In fact, it's late already. So, where can I find him?"

"How do we know you're on the level?" one of them asked.

"Fanetti!" Heck cried on impulse. "Do you know what happened to Fanetti?"

"Naw."

"Me and Willy shot him," said Heck, "in both legs. That ought to prove I'm like this—" he crossed his index and middle fingers— "with Willy. Here, if you don't believe me, call this number."

One of them called the number. And spoke. And listened. And returned with an awed look on his face. "The little guy told the truth."

At that moment the loudspeaker blared: "In the fifth race, the results: Miramar and Sultan's Lady in a dead heat."

The two thugs at the barrier began to argue about the respective merits of Miramar and Sultan's Lady. Numbers flashed on the tote board. Sultan's Lady had won on the shorter odds and that meant something to one of the thugs. It seemed to mean the opposite to the other.

"Willy Talese," Heck said. "I've got to find where he hangs out. It's a matter of

life and death. I've got to see him."

"I thought you said business." Suspiciously.

"Well, yes. Of course."

"Pal, I wish I could help you. Hey, do any of you guys know Willy's hangout address? Confidential, of course. For Willy's good friend here."

They all shook their heads blankly. The speaker told Heck: "And I'm Willy's number three lootenant. It shows you how careful you got to be these days. You just can't trust nobody."

"But somebody must surely know!"

"Well, listen," Willy's number three lieutenant said, "you might try Johnny The Cat Simese."

"Johnny the, uh—"

"Johnny The Cat Simese. He hangs out at Ada's gym, when he ain't bodyguarding Willy's corpus."

"You don't mean corpus, stupid," one of the other thugs said. "A corpus is a dead man."

"Well, anyhow," said the lieutenant.

"Ada's gym," memorized Heck. "Johnny The Cat Simese." He teleported. He vanished.

"Hey, what the hell?" one of the thugs said.

And another one: "Where'd the little guy go?"

They looked around. Naturally, there was no Heck.

Heck bounced on canvas.

He looked up. A menacing-looking fat man came toward him wearing bathing trunks and stale sweat. Another menacing-looking fat man was on the other side of Heck. This was in a wrestling ring. Outside the ring, an enormous woman some six feet tall and five feet wide and quite shapeless and chewing on a wad of tobacco big as a baseball yelled in a gravelly voice:

"Cut it, cut it! Where'd you come from, sonny-boy?"

"I'm looking for Johnny The Cat Simese," Heck said.

"I'm The Cat," a third wrestler, wearing a bathrobe, said, and came over to the ring. "What's he want, Ada?"

"How should I know?" the fat woman said, spitting a brown stream of tobacco juice.

"It's confidential," Heck said, "and it's urgent." He climbed awkwardly through the ropes and walked along the ring apron, then climbed down. He whispered in Johnny the Cat Simese's well-cauiflowered ear: "I'm looking for Mr. Talese."

"What makes you think I know anybody named Talese? Wait a minute! Talese! You mean Scarface Willy."

"Yes," said Heck.

The next thing that happened happened so fast that Heck hardly knew he was the target of a well-coordinated wrestling attack. Two big hands caught him. A big leg got behind him. He fell down. A big body fell on top of him, squeezing the wind out of his lungs. He looked bleary-eyed into Johnny The Cat's face.

"So!" Johnny The Cat cried exultantly. "So!"

"Wh—what's the matter?" Heck managed.

"As if you didn't know, pal. Get up!"

"That's impossible. You're on top of me."

Johnny The Cat got up. He propelled Heck to his feet and got his right arm in a hammerlock, forcing it up between his shoulder blades. "So," he said, "old Willy was right."

"R—right about what?"

"No rough stuff here, please," Ada said. "Only in the ring."

"This is the Chicago guy," Johnny The Cat declared.

Ada came over and slapped Heck's face. I can teleport, Heck thought in despair, but it wouldn't do any good. The Cat was holding him. "I've never been to Chicago in my life," Heck protested.

"Not much you ain't," said Johnny The Cat.

"Well, I haven't."

"You might as well admit it. You're Little Hymie. Well, ain't you?"

"No," said Heck. "I'm Hector Finch of *Hector Finch, We Sell Anything.*"

"You're Little Hymie and you come here to rub out Scarface Willy. That Willy now, he's smart. He figures the knock-out boy has got to find him first, see? So he sends his troopers—"

"Troopers?"

"Like me, stupid. He sends us out on our usual business, figuring you, Little Hymie, would come looking for him by finding us."

"You're right," Heck said suddenly. "Take me to Scarface Willy for my punishment."

"Take you to him, pal? That's the last thing we'll do. We'll take you, all right. We'll take you outside for a little schlammin, then back you go to Chicago as a warning to the other boys that Scarface Willy is strong enough to buck the whole damn Syndicate if he wants-ta."

"Then, in that case, I am not Little Hymie."

"You just now said you was."

Big Ada said, somewhat exasperated: "Will you guys for cryin' out loud make up yer minds?"

Johnny The Cat said: "Hold on to him, Leech."

One of the two wrestlers in the ring climbed down and took the hammerlock from Johnny The Cat. Heck was still held so that he could not move. "I'm getting dressed," Johnny The Cat explained, and disappeared in the direction of a sign marked, Locker Room.

"Listen," Heck began.

"It ain't none of my business," Ada told him.

A few minutes later, Johnny The Cat came out. He took the hammerlock back from The Leech. "Need any help?" The Leech asked.

"My pleasure," said The Cat.

He pushed Heck ahead of him down a flight of stairs. It led outside to an alley.

"Now, pal," said Johnny The Cat.

He was still clutching Heck's arm, but Heck had no choice. He teleported.

Taking Johnny The Cat Simese with him.

"Hey, who turned out the lights!" Johnny The Cat yelled. "How come it's dark ina middle of the day?"

The darkness was absolute. Heck had teleported out without teleporting in anywhere. "It isn't dark," said Heck, improvising. "It's your eyes. I blinded you."

"You blinded me how?"

"Mental suggestion. Like—like a witch-doctor's curse."

"Say, are you kidding me or something?" But there was alarm in Johnny The Cat's voice.

"Would I kid about a thing like that? Do you want your sight back?"

"I feel just like I'm floating."

"You're dis-oriented because you can't see."

"Dis which?"

"Do you ever want to see again?"

"Yeah!" pleaded Johnny The Cat.

"Then take me to Scarface Willy. Right now."

A pause. Then: "So you can hit him in the head. No thanks. My life wouldn't be worth a plug nickel if I did."

"I am not Little Hymie. I have absolutely nothing to do with Little Hymie. I promise you that."

"That's what Little Hymie would say if he wanted to see

the boss. If he wanted to kill the boss."

"So, stay blind."

Silence. Heck let the silence grow. He could feel Johnny The Cat Simese's big hand moving uneasily between his shoulder blades.

"Ain't you gonna say nothing else?" The Cat asked.

"Ain't you gonna ask again, pal?"

No answer.

"Ain't you gonna say I can see again if I take you to Willy? Ain't you?"

Finally Heck said: "You don't even have to take me. Just tell me where it is."

"I—I can't."

"Just think where it is!"

"I won't—"

Heck smiled suddenly in the darkness. "Try not to think about it," he said. "I've put the thought in your mind. You have to think about it now, don't you? You couldn't stop thinking about it if you wanted to. Where is Scarface Willy? You know, don't you, Johnny The Cat? Don't try and tell me you don't know. Where is he? Think about it! Where is Scarface Willy?"

After the long silence, Heck's sudden deluge of words brought a groan from the frightened Johnny The Cat. But abruptly the groan became a shout of anger. "I don't have to listen to you," Johnny said. "All right. I'm blind. All right. But I still got you. I can still give you that schlammin, Little Hymie."

Heck felt his hand forced up cruelly between his shoulder blades. He was spun around. Something cracked. He wondered if his hand were broken. He had only seconds now, he knew. Seconds before Johnny The Cat Simese began to administer the schlammin, gangdomese for a beating he'd bear the traces of for the rest of his life. He had tried to find Patty—and he'd lost. Patty was still in Scarface Willy's hands. And he, Heck, was all washed up. A little guy, he thought in a flood of self-pity, who was one of the best goldarn salesmen and perfectly happy being a salesman, but who was in way over his depth now.

He heard Johnny The Cat's harsh anticipatory breathing.

He knew Johnny The Cat was about to strike him with those huge, powerful hands.

He knew that in a matter of minutes he would be a beaten pulp. . . .

"Try not to think of where Willy is!" he cried—and clutched Johnny The Cat Simese—and hoped—and teleported!

It was a large, comfortable looking room. It was not empty. It was far from empty.

"Patty!" Heck cried.

Because Patty was there.

She seemed very frightened. She was standing next to Scarface Willy and Heck got the impression she wasn't frightened because of him. She was frightened for him. Or maybe frightened with him.

Because Scarface Willy didn't look so good, either.

There were two other men in the room. One was somewhat below medium size—about Heck's own height. This must be Little Hymie, Heck thought. Little Hymie held a gun. The bigger man with him was sneering. It was Hymie who did the talking.

"O.K., Willy," he said, "then you and your moll are both going to get it."

"I'm not his moll!" wailed Patty.

Johnny The Cat hulked in bewilderment behind Heck. There was very little time left, Heck knew. Johnny The Cat was too bewildered to do anything. . . .

Patty's eyes went big when Heck shouted her name a second time. Apparently the first time he hadn't materialized sufficiently for them to hear him. Willy stared at him in disbelief. The big man with Little Hymie began to turn around. He was every bit as big as Johnny The Cat Simese.

And the killer's small hand tightened on his gun—

Heck jumped, launching himself at Little Hymie. The gun went off, furrowing Heck's cheek. The slug plowed harmlessly into the ceiling. Heck and Little Hymie scrambled over and over on the floor. Heck got the gun from Little Hymie, then Little Hymie hit him and the gun went clattering across the floor.

Patty, Willy, Johnny The Cat and the other big man all lunged for it. Little Hymie hit Heck again, and Heck counter punched. Little Hymie bleated. Heck hit him again. Little Hymie subsided.

Heck looked up in triumph. His eyes went wide.

The other big man, Hymie's companion, had the gun. He was far bigger and far more capable than Hymie. It still looked more like curtains. It looked more like curtains than ever before. Hymie stood up groggily. "Over there with the rest of them," ordered Little Hymie.

The man with the gun

waved it. Heck began to move.

"It's Muscles Freddy," Johnny The Cat said in awe.

"They sent Muscles Freddy here to do the job on you, Boss. I always knew you were big time."

Muscles Freddy waved the gun again. "Who gets it first?" he asked.

Little Hymie glanced up. Little Hymie's left eye was swelling rapidly. He shook a fist at Heck. "Give it to the little guy," he said. "The wise guy."

Heck gulped. He watched the big hand begin to squeeze, drawing the trigger back. The muzzle of the automatic pointed at his belly and seemed big enough to swallow him.

He teleported.

Not far—just across the room. Right behind Muscles Freddy.

"Hey, where'd he go!" Freddy cried.

"Behind you!" warned Hymie.

Freddy whirled.

Heck teleported again.

"Hey!" hollered Freddy. "He goes on and off like a neon sign."

Heck materialized alongside him, grapping for the gun. But Freddy drew it back and fired. Heck had beaten him to it by a split second. Heck had teleported.

"Damn neon sign!" repeated Freddy.

Heck re-materialized. Freddy gaped. Heck flashed off. Then on. On and off. Off and on. Every time he flashed on again he struck at the bewildered Muscles Freddy's gunhand. Finally, as was inevitable, Freddy dropped the gun. Heck and Little Hymie dove for it, their heads striking together. Little Hymie drew back and slammed the edge of his palm across Heck's Adam's apple. Heck gagged, but held the gun in his hand and climbed to his feet. He hit Hymie in the jaw with the barrel of the gun on the way up, and Hymie fell down. Muscles Freddy stood there, looking at the gun. He was completely stunned.

"This is the first time in my life I ever called the police," said Scarface Willy, and went to the phone. He got halfway through dialing, and stopped. "I can't," he said.

"Why, Boss?" asked Johnny The Cat.

"The hideout."

"But if Muscles Freddy and Hymie know," Heck pointed out, "you'll have to change it anyway."

"Hadn't thunk of that," said Willy, and dialed again.

While they waited for the police he told Heck: "I owe you a favor, see? On account of you saved my life. So, I tell you what. I'm letting you and the fiancée go. And I won't horn in on your business."

"Oh, Heck, you're wonderful!" cried Patty.

But Heck looked at Scarface Willy and shook his head; and while Patty looked shocked, he said: "No, pal. That won't do at all. You never were man enough to horn in on my business, you understand?"

Scarface Willy's face went mean and for a moment Heck thought the racketeer was going to try to take the gun from him. Heck spoke slowly and carefully, all the while watching Hymie and Freddy with the gun. The police came and took them away. Heck went on talking. He was going to be a salesman in this wild adventure after all. He had to sell Scarface Willy the biggest idea of all. He made his plea eloquently, richly, cleverly, like those very best of salesmen who can speak far better than any lawyer who ever pleaded a case. When he finished, Scarface Willy was almost in tears.

"All right," Willy said at last. "You saved my life after I kidnapped your girl. I know I'm a louse. I know it. I owe you a favor, pal. You're right. You name it."

"I want you to de-burgle," Heck said in triumph.

"Do which?"

"De-burgle. First our warehouse. Return everything we have to its original owner. You have the outfit that can do it, if we give you temporary use of teleportation. Then all our customers. You'll have to burgle the goods from them and de-burgle them to their original owners. Then you'll have to put up money to cover payment of our staff. We're liquidating. We'll pay our profits back to our customers, of course."

"How much will it cost me?" Willy wanted to know.

"Several score thousand dollars, I'm afraid."

Willy's face went white, but Heck had done too good a selling job. Patty beamed at him. He beamed at Patty. It would all be done, he knew.

There remained one detail. No, two. Laara. And the little fellow with the slightly oversized head. Heck didn't think he'd have any trouble, though. He was reasserting himself as a salesman. He felt the happiness welling within him. Laara and the little guy would go home, where they

belonged. That would be a cinch. He knew it would be. His troubles were over.

"You'll begin at once?" he asked Scarface Willy.

"Yes," Willy said. There were still tears in his eyes. "It's the least I can do."

Heck took Patty's hand.

"Where are we going?" she asked.

"To get the details straightened out. To get married. To go on a honeymoon. To see Mr. Weatherby about getting my old job back—with a considerable raise in salary."

Patty's eyes turned sultry. "Go back to *get married,* darling, and kind of fill in."

"Well, we get married and go on a real honeymoon—"

She stood very close to him. "And on the honeymoon, we—"

He reddened, "Well, we—"

Patty moved even closer. He suddenly had difficulty with his breathing.

Patty murmured, "We do this — and this — and this —only more so—"

"Patty—please—"

"Oh, Heck, you're the most wonderful husband a girl could ever have—that is, you will be. You're so wonderful."

Heck smiled. As a salesman, he thought. Only as a salesman.

But he didn't say it.

THE END

WAS THE GROTESQUE ANIMAL A MENACE OR A BLESSING?

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Pst! This is top secret. Don't let it get around, but we've got the Russians right where we want them. They haven't got a secret left to their name. We know every detail. You see, the Russians were pretty sure their inner circle was leakproof, that no one could penetrate their vaults. But they reckoned without—

THE MAN WHO KNEW EVERYTHING

By RANDALL GARRETT

DR. H. WOLSTADT sat in a small, very secret laboratory in Arlington, Virginia, and twisted the dials on an oscilliscope. A pale green line wriggled up and down on the screen, and Dr. Wolstadt watched it with anticipation.

"If this works," he muttered softly, more to himself than to his assistant, "we will have a communication beam that will be better than radio."

The green line wriggled and changed form. Slowly, as the physicist manipulated the controls, the green line stopped moving.

"There!" shouted Wolstadt, "that is the wave form we want!" He reached over toward a switch. "Check your meters, Magruder!"

The assistant carefully adjusted the recording instruments of the huge machine that filled half the laboratory. "All right, Dr. Wolstadt, we're ready."

"Good!" Wolstadt pressed the switch.

The assistant watched the meters and automatic graphs.

"I'm afraid it didn't work, sir," he said at last. "The instruments aren't reacting as you expected."

Wolstadt shrugged resignedly. "Nevertheless, I think we are on the right track. Come, my boy, we will try again."

He shut off the machine.

The machine hadn't done what the scientists had expected of it, but it had another effect which was entirely unknown to them. During

He was sure of only one thing—he had a headache.

the few seconds of operation, an invisible ray had been beamed out of the machine. At the speed of light, the ray went through the wall of the lab and into Dr. Wolstadt's study. Like an X-ray, it went through the books and references on the physicist's desk. In a straight line, it shot out of the laboratory, silent and invisible. A mile or so farther on, it struck the Pentagon Building and went through. Among other things, it went through a complete copy of the *Encyclopedia Brittanica,* Roget's *Thesaurus,* the *Oxford Unabridged Dictionary,* a twenty volume set of *The History and Analysis of Military Tactics,* and a copy of *Amazing Stories* that some general had left on his desk.

Like a flashlight going through plateglass, the beam went through files, papers, memorandums, abstracts, reports, desks, chairs, brick, stone, and concrete. Through the Pentagon and across the Potomac it went, through building after building, unnoticed and invisible.

Then, on the far side of Washington, D.C., several miles from the laboratory of Dr. Wolstadt, it struck the head of a human being.

Philip Merriwether was a nobody. He made thirty-five dollars a week at a very dull job and lived in a cheap rooming house that had been built around 1880 and not remodeled since. He was still wearing a suit he had bought in 1947, and on his thin, five-foot-four frame, it looked even older. His education had stopped at the sixth grade, and he had almost flunked out of that. He had a mousy face, stringy hair, and a dull look in his eyes.

In other words, he was just about as nobody as a human being can get without being an absolute bum.

It wasnt that Phil Merriwether was really stupid; he was simply afflicted with an incredibly bad memory. He could forget more in five minutes than he could learn in five years. Oh, he could remember commonplace things easily enough—his name, where he lived, things like that. He could read and write tolerably well, although his spelling was intolerable. He could add and subtract with fair ease, but, having forgotten most of the multiplication table, he found "higher mathematics," such as long division, almost impossible to do without hours of laborious thinking.

In a way, his poor memory

was economically useful. Phil loved to read mystery stories, and, having collected a total of fifty-seven paperback editions of the better detective novels, he found that there was no necessity of buying more, because he could reread the old ones. By the time he got around to them again, he had forgotten the plot and the identity of the murderer. Naturally, he never tried to solve any of them; he could never remember the clues.

In routine work, Phil Merriwether was fairly efficient. If he did something every day, he could remember it overnight, and could do it again the next day. But his superiors soon found out that it was almost disastrous to give him a vacation, because he had a tendency to forget what he was supposed to do when he came back to work. That is, if he remembered to show up for work.

In spite of all that, Phil was a nice sort of fellow. He was likable, in a dull sort of way, and got along with most of his fellow workers. He couldn't tell funny stories, of course, nor play a decent game of cards, but he was an excellent conversationalist because, no matter what was said to him, he could never think of an argument against it. He was a good listener because he hadn't anything to say.

But his favorite pastime was walking. He liked to stroll around the nation's capitol, taking in the sights, and just plain enjoying himself. He always walked the same route every night; if he didn't, he was likely to get lost. Once, several years earlier, he had taken a wrong turn and ended up in unfamiliar territory. He had asked a passer-by how to reach his address, but had forgotten the instructions, and so had ended up hopelessly lost. He had finally been forced to take a taxi home, a luxury he could ill afford. After that, he stuck to his routine.

It was on one of these evening strolls that a very peculiar thing happened to Philip Merriwether. He was walking slowly along the sidewalk, carefully minding his own business, when, without warning, there was a strange, buzzy feeling in his head. It grew stronger; it felt like someone was playing a firehose on his brain. His skull felt as though it were suddenly being filled with a vast, overpowering t o r r e n t of *words*—hundreds of words; thousands of words; millions upon millions of words!

Under the pressure of this verbal onslaught, Philip Merriwether's mind reeled. He pressed his palms to his temples and fainted dead away.

When he came to, there were several passers-by crowded around him. One of them was kneeling by his side, taking his pulse.

"Ha — Wha — what happened?" he asked, unoriginally enough.

"You fainted," said the man who was taking his pulse. "Just lie still; it's all right. I'm a physician."

"Fainting," said Phil, "is normally a mild form of shock in which the blood vessels of the abdomen become distended and engorged with blood, thus reducing the blood pressure and temporarily depriving the brain of its normal oxygen supply, which causes momentary loss of consciousness."

The doctor blinked. "What? Oh. Yes. That's quite correct, sir. Do you have these attacks often."

Phil's mouth had remained open after his last word. After a minute, he gulped. "Did I say that?"

"What?" the doctor asked for a second time. "Do you feel all right?"

Phil Merriwether stood up hastily. "My head feels a little funny, but I think I'm all right."

"If you want to go to a hospital—"

"No, no, thank you. I'm all right, really I am. I feel completely resuscitated, thanks to your therapeutic ministrations."

"Think nothing of it, sir. My duty, you know," said the physician.

"The Oath of Hippocrates," said Phil, "makes it obligatory for the physician to alleviate suffering, illness, and infirmity, and induce salubrity in his fellow man in the most efficacious manner at his command."

"Uh, yes, of course," said the doctor, looking baffled. "Well, good luck." With that, he picked up his black bag and walked rapidly off in the opposite direction. The other passers-by had already gone about their business.

Phil, meanwhile, began walking towards his home, his head still feeling a little peculiar. What was the matter with him? What had happened? And where on Earth had he gotten all those big words?

Polysyllabic vocables, said a voice in his mind, *although recognized by the erudite as not being necessarily indica-*

tive of scholarly attainments, are nevertheless profoundly impressive to the hoi polloi.

Phil nodded slowly to himself. Yeah, big words were impressive, all right. But where had he picked them all up?

"I'd better go home and take an aspirin," he said aloud.

Aspirin, said the voice, *is the acetic acidester of salicylic acid, a white, crystalline solid having the empirical formula—*

Holding his hands to his ears, Philip Merriwether ran home as fast as his spindly legs could propel him.

B. J. Holly, office manager for Starr & Sons, Inc., flipped a switch on his desk intercom. "Where is Merriwether?" he snapped. "That boy was supposed to have picked up these letters for filing half an hour ago. I can't wait any longer."

"Mr. Merriwether phoned in this morning, sir," said the secretary's voice. "He said he was a little ill, and he'd be late. He—oh! Just a moment, sir; he just came in."

"Send him in here!" ordered B. J. Holly.

Mr. Holly frowned at Phil Merriwether as soon as the door opened. "Under the weather a bit, eh, Merriwether?"

Phil nodded. "Yes, sir. My head feels queer."

Mr. Holly suppressed an impulse to remark that he wasn't at all surprised. In his estimation, anyone with a head like Merriwether's would feel odd all the time. But Mr. Holly, although somewhat tyrranical, and definitely a stuffed shirt, was not basically cruel, so he said nothing that vicious.

"A bit of a hangover, perhaps?" he asked suspiciously.

Phil was picking up the papers for the file room. "No, sir," he said absently. "A hangover is caused by the toxic effects of various isomeric forms of higher alcohols and other impurities normally present in alcoholic beverages, plus a depletion of vitamins, especially B-one, in the system. I don't drink."

"I—uh—I see." But Mr. Holly did not see. He was totally baffled. He watched in astonishment as Phil Merriwether walked out the door of the office.

Merriwether, himself was slightly bemused. How had he done it? He knew perfectly well what he was saying; a full night of thinking had managed to bring to him the realization that something—

he knew not what—had happened to his memory. It seemed to him that there must be something he could do with it, but he didn't quite know what.

The decision was practically forced upon him just before lunchtime. He was putting on his coat to go out for lunch when B. J. Holly stepped out of his office. The office manager was preparing to have lunch with an out-of-town buyer, and as he stepped up to the visiting fireman, he said: "Well, as General Pershing said: 'Lafayette, we are here!'" He chuckled at his own wit, paying no attention to Merriwether.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Phil, "but the general never said that; as a matter of fact, he said later that it was put into his mouth by a newspaperman. He said—"

B. J. glowered at him. An office boy, even if he is thirty-four years of age, is not supposed to contradict his superior.

"Look, son," said B. J., "I happened to be there. I was only a private, but I happened to be standing right next to him."

"That's impossible, sir," Phil said quietly. "According to Federal records, you were born on April second, nineteen-oh-four. You were only fourteen years old at the time. You have no military record with the United States Army."

The out-of-town buyer suppressed a snicker. B. J. Holly turned purple said: "I'll see you after lunch."

After lunch, Philip Merriwether lost the job he had held for five years.

At seven o'clock that night, he sat in a small bar, sipping disconsolately at a glass of Coca-Cola. Not knowing where he was going to get another job, he was trying to drown his thoughts in soda-water and television. The show on the screen was "You Can't Lose," a quiz show produced by the Boltman Automobile Corporation.

The quizmaster was grinning sardonically at the hapless contestant. "You have arrived at the fifty thousand dollar question," he said. "Since you chose geometry as your category, the question will be on that subject. Are you ready?"

The contestant nodded unhappily.

"All right, here's the question: What is the value of *pi* to eight decimal places?"

Before the contestant could say a word, Phil muttered:

"Three point one four one five nine two six five—plus." He didn't notice what the contestant said, but the quizmaster shook his head in mock sorrow. "I'm sorry, sir, but the correct answer is: three point one four one five nine two six five. Better luck next time."

The coarse, unshaven man standing next to Phil looked at him in awe. "Hey, buddy," he said, "that's the ninth time you've answered right. Why don't you get on that program and make yourself some dough?"

Phil blinked at his Coke and thought it over. Then his face brightened. "Yeah," he said, grinning, "why don't I?"

It took him three weeks to get into the studio, and by that time, his severance pay was almost gone. He was nearly broke, and had no prospects of a job. He *had* to make good.

By pure chance, he was chosen as one of the first contestants. The quizmaster beamed at him pleasantly.

"You understand the rules, don't you?" he asked. "All you have to do . . ."

He went on, but Phil didn't hear him; he was too scared. When the first question popped up, he said: "I beg your pardon?"

"I'll repeat the question," the quizmaster said. "You have chosen the 'General Category.' That pays twice as much, but it means I can ask you any question I like. The first one was: 'Who were the Essenes?' "

Since the General Category questions paid off twice as much as the Restricted Categories, they were about four times as hard. But that didn't bother Phil Merriwether in the least.

"The Essenes," he said, "were an obscure Jewish sect which flourished during the time of Christ, from before 100 B.C. to about 70 A.D. They are believed to be instrumental in the composition of the so-called Dead Sea Scrolls, which were discovered—"

"That's enough," the quizmaster said. "You've given the right answer!" The orchestra sounded a chord. Applause followed.

"Second question: Listen carefully. Henry the Seventh's title was the same as the title of the last Tudor king of England; the last Tudor king had the same name. What was the name of the last Tudor ruler of England?" The quizmaster smirked hap-

pily; the question was a trick one.

"Elizabeth the First was the last Tudor *ruler,*" said Phil. "The last Tudor *king* was Henry the Eighth."

Naturally, the answer was right.

"Very good," said the quizzer. "Number three: what does pneumonaltramicroscopicvolkanikoniosis mean?"

Phil closed his eyes and listened to the little voice inside his head. He said: "It is an inflammation of the lungs caused by tiny particles of rock dust; it is commonly known as 'silicosis' or 'miner's consumption.' "

The quizmaster looked almost shocked, but, good showman that he was, he managed to keep a bland expression on his face.

"That's *right!*" he bellowed.

Phil Merriwether grinned happily. He didn't know how it had come about, but, somehow, something had filled his head full of all kinds of amazing facts. It didn't matter what the question was, all Phil had to do was think about it, and the answer was in his memory. He smiled, waiting for the next question.

"You've come to the $25,000 question," said the MC. "If you want to go on, you will have to be put in a soundproof booth so that you won't be prompted by the audience. If you want to come back next week—"

"I'll take it now," said Phil Merriwether.

So they put him in a soundproof booth. All he could hear was the announcer's voice.

Phil smiled to himself. Twenty-five thousand dollars so far! It was fantastic! He'd never have to work again!

He answered the next question easily. Fifty thousand dollars! Fantastic!

The announcer said: "What is the mathematical formula for the world's most powerful weapon?"

Phil grinned. That was simple. "The formula is: *i* over *b* times *a* equals *pi* to the *i* times *e* over *mu*," he said.

"Ohhh, I'm sorry, sir," the announcer said sadly. "The basic formula for the manufacture of the atomic bomb is: *E* equals *m* times *c* squared. But you still have your fifty thousand dollars; congratulations and better luck next time."

Phil Merriwether blinked. He could hardly believe it. He *knew* his answer was right. There must be a mistake. But no amount of argument did

him any good. Within fifteen minutes, he was out on the street. The studio had promised that the check would be deposited to his account in the morning. Phil shrugged and went home.

At midnight, Philip Merriwether woke up suddenly to see the glare of a flashlight being shone in his face.

"Are you Philip Merriwether?" growled a voice.

"Yes, I am. What's the meaning of this?"

The lights in the room went on to reveal five men with drawn guns standing outside the door. As they came into the room, the man with the flashlight flicked it off. "Search the room," he said to the others.

As they methodically began their search, Phil said: "What's going on here? Who are you?"

"FBI," snapped the man who was obviously the leader of the group. "Are you sure you're Philip Merriwether? We'll be taking your fingerprints shortly, so it won't do you any good to lie."

"Certainly I'm me!" Phil snapped, irritated. "What makes you think I'm not?"

"Never mind," said the Federal agent.

The truth was that Merriwether no longer looked like the lackluster character he had been a few weeks before. His eyes had a sparkle to them, his body had more springiness. He looked more alive. He was no longer the colorless man he had been.

"Nothing unusual in the room, sir," said one of the men who had been searching.

"Okay," said the leader to Merriwether, "put on your clothes. You're coming with us."

"You can't arrest me!" Phil said. "I haven't done anything. What is the charge?"

"Espionage," said the FBI man without blinking an eyelid.

They put him in a big, powerful Cadillac and drove him through the streets of Washington to an office building near the Capitol. Most of the city was asleep, but this building was ablaze with light. The FBI men parked the car and led Phil into the building. They were greeted by a reception committee the like of which Phil had never seen before.

Two generals, including the Chief of Staff, a couple of admirals, an Air Force general, and a half dozen important-looking civilians, one of whom Phil recognized as the

Secretary of Defense himself!

They sat Phil down in a chair without a word, and just looked at him for a few seconds; then the Secretary of Defense said: "What do you know about the Q-beam?"

"The Q-beam," Phil told him, "is a top-secret weapon. It is a ray which is capable of paralyzing without killing, and can operate over a distance of several hundred miles. The basic formula is—"

"Never mind what it is!" snapped the Chief of Staff. "The whole United States heard you give it out over the air this evening!"

"What else do you know about our defenses?" the Secretary asked.

Phil told them. He knew how big the atomic stockpiles were, where the bombs were, and how they were to be used. He knew everything about the ICBM rocket program and where the launching sites were. He knew where every ship in the Navy was and what sort of armament it carried. He told them where the secret airbases were hidden and how many bombers were at each.

As he continued, the officials became more and more nervous. They fidgeted as each new piece of information was disclosed, and the flow of information seemed endless.

At last the Secretary of Defense said: "That's enough!" His face was white. He turned to the others. "Gentlemen, I think we can say without doubt that we have captured the most cunning, clever, and dangerous spy in the world. The question is: What shall we do with him?"

"How did you get this information?" one of the generals asked.

"I don't know," Phil said truthfully. "It just came to me."

"He won't talk," said an admiral.

"Who do you work for?" asked another.

"I used to work for Starr & Son, but they fired me three weeks ago."

"I mean, what country?"

"I don't work for *anybody!*"

The Secretary of Defense looked up at the FBI man.

"I want everything on this man—*everything!* He has to be investigated as no other man has ever been. If possible, we want to know what this man has been doing every second of his life ever since he was born!"

The FBI man nodded. "I'll

have to check with the Chief, of course, but I'm sure we can put every man in the Bureau on this job."

The Secretary nodded. "A few kidnap cases and things like that will have to wait, but that's nothing compared to this."

The FBI man left, and the other men began grilling Phil Merriwether again. It went on for hours.

Phil Merriwether sat in the deepest, most secluded cell of the United States Government's greatest security prison. He sat and thought, his brain working more furiously than it had ever worked before. He was tired and haggard from loss of sleep, and worn out from hours of questioning. But that wasn't the worst of it. The entire top brass of the government was in a stew over what they should do with Philip Merriwether. The FBI could get no evidence on him; there was nothing to prove he was a spy. And even if there had been, the case could never be brought to court. Phil knew too much.

"Good heavens," he moaned, "how did I ever get into a fix like this?"

"You're a blabbermouth," he answered himself. "If you hadn't told them all that stuff, you'd never have been in this jam!"

But how did he know all the information about the U.S. Government's most top secret plans? It must have had something to do with that fainting spell. How did that explain it?

"Well," he said to himself, "you've got a lot of information—use it!"

So he sat on the edge of the hard bunk, his mind searching for some clue as to what had happened to him.

He was still sitting like that when the Secretary of Defense and the President of the United States walked into the cell some hours later. He had thought about all the data he had on every subject from anthropology to zoology. It had something to do with neurology and radiation physics, he was sure, but what?

And then, quite suddenly, the pieces clicked together.

When the Chief Executive walked into his cell, Phil beamed happily. "I'm pleased to meet you, Mr. President."

The President frowned. "I must admit, Mr. Merriwether, that it is a pleasure to meet you, too. I admire such abilities as yours, although I also wish you had never been

born. It seems you know more about our national defense than I do."

"It's amazing," said the Secretary. "According to the FBI, this fiendishly clever man has been masquerading as an ordinary blockhead for more than thirty years. No one suspected his true genius. The only thing we can't figure out is *why* he shot off his mouth over television."

Phil said: "Mr. Secretary, I didn't think about it. I didn't realize it was so secret. I'm sorry. But I think I can show you how I got all this information."

The President looked blank. "Show us? You mean you're willing to betray your espionage system?"

"I don't have any spy system," Phil said. "Will you give me a pencil and a piece of paper?"

The Secretary handed him a notebook and a ball-point pen, and Phil began to write. "According to File X-99761, in the War Department's Ultra Top Secret Section, a Dr. Heinrich Wolstadt is working on a secret communication device. I'm putting some formulas on this paper. Ask Dr. Wolstadt what effect this particular wave form would have on the human brain."

The Secretary of Defense and the President looked at each other.

"I guess we might as well," the President said.

It was several hours later that Dr. Wolstadt was rushed into Phil's cell. He was so excited that his German accent became much heavier than usual.

"Is this the chentleman? *Ach!* It's amazing! How did it happen? You were standing right in the path of the ray, *nein?*"

"I think so, Dr. Wolstadt. Didn't you suspect what effect the beam might have had?"

"Never!" said the physicist. "Not until I saw your mathematics. It's unbelievable to think this could happen!"

"For Heaven's sake!" said the President. "What happened?"

Wolstadt turned around to face the Chief Executive.

"It's very simple. The derivation of the Q-beam that I have been working on got out of control for a second. It went through all my files, and all the files in the Pentagon, and Heaven only knows what else. It picked up all that information and put it in Mr. Merriwether's mind!"

"Amazing!" said the President.

"Fantastic!" said the Secretary of Defense.

"Will it work with anybody?" the President asked.

Dr. Wolstadt shook his head. "No. This is a most unusual case. Mr. Merriwether, according to the FBI reports, had a terrible memory before the accident happened. He is actually a very intelligent man, but he always forgot things, and that made him look stupid.

"But, fortunately, it meant that his memory was almost a total blank. Therefore, the ray could implant all this data on his memory.

"It's like recording something on an L-P disc. If it already has music on it, the recorder just ruins the disc. But if it's blank, the recorder puts music on it. You see?"

"Then if it had hit anyone but me—" Phil began.

"—it would probably have driven them insane," said Dr. Wolstadt.

"That still leaves us the problem of what to do with Mr. Merriwether," said the President.

"I think I have an idea," Phil said. "Want to hear it?"

Some months later, two men arrived by air in the city of Moscow. One of them went directly to the American Embassy. In his brief case was a small, very compact machine.

The Ambassador shook his hand warmly. "The President told me to give you the run of the place, Dr. Wolstadt. What are you going to do."

"I'm sorry," said Wolstadt, "but I cannot tell even you. All I require is a room in the Embassy which faces the Kremlin."

"That can be arranged. But where is your companion? I understood there were to be two of you."

"He is, shall we say, taking a stroll around Moscow."

"But he can't do that!" the Ambassador said. "The President said he was the most valuable man on Earth! He might get arrested."

"That is the chance we have to take. Now if you'll show me to that room, I'll go about my business."

Some distance away, on the opposite side of the Kremlin from the American Embassy, Philip Merriwether, the most valuable spy that ever existed, waited patiently for the ray that would be generated inside the Embassy to strike his head. In a few seconds, he would know even more than he already did.

He smiled happily. This was the life! **THE END**

The smile she gave him was the one she reserved for her husband.

You're a detective and you have an assignment to find a client's wife. This good-time gal has found herself a nicer body and is masquerading as some other fellow's wife. So how can you find her? Simple. You get into one male body after another and become a different girl's husband each night. And you're determined to find her even if you have to be every woman's husband to do it! A dull assignment? If you think so, read—

AN EYE FOR THE LADIES

By DARIUS JOHN GRANGER

HE WAS a plump fellow in about the approximate dimensions of a penguin, and as stiffly dressed. Since I'd been an insurance investigator last week but had become a private detective this, and since he was my first potential case, I was needless to say interested.

"It's my wife," he said.

"Your wife," I repeated, searching for but not finding some of the sharp P.I. dialogue I'd read in the books by Chandler, Evans, Marlowe and others.

"You see, we're tourists from another planet My name is Xlptl."

I just sat there.

"Mrs. Xlptl is missing."

"Ah," I said, leaning forward. This was something I could understand. Maybe I had heard him wrong about that name.

"Missing how?" I asked.

"Mrs. Xlptl," said my potential client, "failed to re-transmigrate."

"To do which?"

"Re-transmigrate. To get out of her Earth body after touring Earth."

A nut, I thought. Your first case, Brody, and he's a nut. Ah, well, there goes the retainer. But you might as well humor him. "And did you," I said, "ah, get out of your Earth body?"

"Goodness, yes," said Mr. Xlptl promptly, removing his jacket. "You never saw an Earthman without shoulders, did you?"

He wasn't kidding. I gawked until he put the jacket back on. His neck slanted down

gradually, widening as it went, to the broad waist. He had no shoulders to speak of. No wonder he looked like a penguin.

"You see," he said in a confidential voice while I continued to gawk, "Mrs. Xlptl thinks she doesn't want to transmigrate back. She thinks she wants to go on being an Earthwoman. Naturally she's wrong. Naturally we ought to go home. Na—"

"Home where?"

"It's a star you can't even see with your biggest telescopes," said Mr. Xlptl, waving his hand deprecatingly. "I want you to find her and bring her back to me. I can make her see the error of her ways and re-transmigrate."

I wondered how you went about finding an un-retransmigrated Mrs. Xlptl, but before I could open my mouth and say something bright, Mr. Xlptl told me: "You see, she disappeared in a busload of honeymooning brides who had been on a quiz program which each week interviews and gives prizes to the half dozen or so prettiest new brides they can find. Now, as the expression goes, the honeymoon is over and each bride has gone home. I have all their addresses. Mrs. Xlptl is hiding in one of their bodies. I'd go and find her myself by transmigrating into the bodies of the respective husbands until I ran across her, but I find an Earth body somewhat uncomfortable and I'm willing to give you fifty dollars a day and expenses for your services if you'll do the job for me, locate her, and bring her back. Is that satisfactory?"

"You mean, I'll transmigrate? I'll get into the bodies of those six husbands of those six pretty new brides—like the husbands were suits of clothing or something?" Humor him, Brody. He's nuts.

"Exactly, Mr. Brody. You will do it?"

I nodded. Mr. Xlptl gave me a check. I decided in advance that it would make like a rubber ball, but I put it in the middle drawer of the desk, anyhow. I reached into the bottle drawer and took out the office bottle. "Have one?" I said.

"Alcohol?" asked Mr. Xlptl in horror. "To me alcohol is extremely toxic."

"Maybe," I said, "you got something there." But I took a small one anyhow and when I looked up there was a sheet of paper with a list of names and addresses on the desk.

"Take them one at a time,"

Mr. Xlptl told me. "Just think about the name and you'll transmigrate. I've already given you the power."

"You have?"

He assured me he had. That was when I blinked my eyes. It was a mistake. Because when I opened them, Mr. Xlptl had disappeared. He didn't walk out of the little office. He didn't jump from the window. The door and the window were both closed. Mr. Xlptl simply vanished.

I took another drink. It was some kind of trick. An optical illusion or something. I thought over what Mr. Xlptl wanted me to do. Six pretty new brides. Me. Jack Brody, their collective husbands. I whistled. Well, that was what a private eye dreamed about in all the shamus books—unlimited access to beautiful womens' boudoirs. I sighed. If only that Xlptl wasn't a nut, I thought. If only what he told me was possible. If only . . .

I sighed again. Better call up one of the dames from your little black book, Brody. No use sighing over what can never be. But automatically I looked down at the list. Study the first name, Xlptl had said. I smiled at my own amazing credulity. Well, chalk it up to wishful thinking.

The first name was Mrs. Hal Drummond (nee Janet Dawes). I thought of the Drummonds and their address, which was in San Francisco, almost three thousand miles from here.

Something buzzed in my ears.

Louder and louder.

The buzzing became a hissing sound. I couldn't place it at first. Then I realized it was the sound a shower makes in the next room. I looked around. A second ago I'd been in my office, in New York. Now I was sitting on a bed. There was a newspaper alongside me. I did a double-take. It was the San Francisco *Chronicle*.

A gag, I thought. It had to be a gag. I got up. I was wearing a bathrobe and slippers. I passed a dresser with a mirror on top. This time I gaped. There was a tall, dark guy standing there in the mirror, staring back at me. I had nothing against him.

Only, he wasn't Jack Brody. That is, he was me—but I wasn't who I'd been a couple of seconds ago.

I felt weak. I sat down on the bed again. There were two doors in the room, besides the closets. One led out

to a hallway. The other was closed. From behind it came the hissing of a shower. Suddenly a girl started to sing in there. She had a nice voice. She was singing about all the ways she loved me.

There was a picture on the dresser, one of those cardboard backed wedding souvenirs. The girl I was leading from the wedding ceremony was a lovely-looking blonde.

The singing stopped. The girl called: "Hal. Hal, honey! Will you come in and scrub my back please?"

I looked in the mirror. The guy looking back at me had a very pale face. He'd been tan a moment ago. My mind was whirling with happy but stage-struck thoughts. Just like Don Juan, I thought. Only Don Juan had to go out over balconies and things. Me —I could get away with it.

"Come on, Hal, honey," the girl called again. I headed for the bathroom door. Well, I'd been invited, hadn't I?

I opened the door. The hissing became louder. There was a lot of steam in the room from the hot shower. The shower stall had one of those translucent glass doors. I could see her through it. She was a tall, statuesque blonde with her hair cut so short she could be in there in the shower without worrying about a shower cap. She was long and tan and pink and delightful.

She slid the shower door back with a wet hand. I got splashed.

She said, "The robe, silly."

I stood there gawking. Finally I got the idea. She didn't want me to get all wet. Or, she didn't want my robe to get all wet. She wanted her lovely back scrubbed. Or maybe we could do some mutual scrubbing. She wanted me there in the shower with her.

I began to take the robe off. She smiled at me through the half-open sliding door of the shower. She glistened with water. She looked all tan and silvery and sleek, sleek as if she were made out of tight-stretched leather.

And then chimes rang. We both heard them. She looked at me and sighed. I looked back at her. I hoped it wasn't too obvious. I hoped my tongue was between my lips and back a bit. She smiled and leaned against me and gave me a shower-water-wet and playful kiss. "Oh, well, darling," she said, as if we could do later whatever we hadn't had a chance to do now. "I guess that must be the Fosters. I guess they're early. Better get the door. I

guess I'll have to scrub my own back."

The shower door slid shut.

I remembered Mr. Xlptl and his mission. There was no doubt about it now, it was going to work out exactly as Mr. Xlptl said it would work out. He'd given me the power, all right. I said: "Janet, there's only one thing."

"What?" she shouted over the hiss and roar of the shower.

The chimes sounded again.

"Mrs. Xlptl," I said in a loud voice.

"What was that? What did you say?"

"Mrs. Xlptl," I repeated.

"Why, what a funny name!" she cried with a little laugh.

"Name?" I said, clearing my throat. "I was only clearing my throat." No doubt of it, Mrs. Xlptl wasn't hiding here.

I went into the bedroom and through it to the hallway. The chimes sounded a third time. To hell with this Hal Drummond guy, I thought. Let him let in his own Fosters. I had a moment of panic, but found the list of names in a pocket of my-Hal-Drummond bathrobe. I studied the second name and address on the list. Chicago, Illinois. Mrs. Dan Carboy (nee Dawn Daring). The address was, Club Chuckle. Dawn Daring, I decided, was in show biz. This sounded like fun. I thought of the name.

And buzzed out of there just as the bewildered Hal Drummond reached the door....

I was dancing with a medium tall redhead whose wonderfully supple figure was all but glued to me. I looked down at her face. She looked up at mine. Her own face was pretty and heavily war-painted, so it would look good behind a baby-spot. She was in show-biz, all right.

We danced slowly to music I hardly heard. Every now and then she leaned up and kissed the side of my chin with her red, red lips.

"If you really want me to quit, Dan," she said.

"No, that's all right," I said automatically.

"But you just a minute ago said you wanted me to quit show biz and settle down to being your wife."

"Oh, did I?" I said.

"Of course you did," she said, slightly exasperated. I felt her move away from me an inch or so. It made a lot of difference. They broke into a mambo suddenly. We both could mambo very well. That

meant something. It meant more confirmation of Mr. Xlptl, because Jack Brody, private eye, didn't know a mambo from a mango.

"When do you go on?" I said.

"You know when. In half an hour."

I looked down at her. Would Dan Carboy kiss his wife now? Probably, I thought. *This* version of Dan Carboy would only if he thought the real Carboy would. I waited for her to make some kind of a gesture, to take the play away from me. We just danced. Then the music stopped and we went to our table where drinks were waiting. Mine was a martini. From the color, it looked very dry. And it was.

"Xlptl," I said.

"What?" She'd heard me. She didn't understand. Her face showed absolutely nothing.

She obviously wasn't Mrs. Xlptl. "Hiccup," I said, s e a r c h i n g surreptitiously through my suit-jacket pockets for the list of names. She smiled at me. I smiled at her. I couldn't find the list. I didn't want to make it obvious, so I didn't go digging down into my pants pockets. That could wait for when she went on. What did she do? I wondered. Sing? Play the piano maybe? Her gown told me nothing. It was long and sheathlike, in a bright scarlet which almost matched her hair in the dim lighting.

Finally there was a fanfare. She patted my hand. "Maybe you're right, Dan," she said, getting up. "Maybe after this month I will quit."

There was a round of polite applause. Dawn drifted over to a little stage and swayed herself onto it. The music began and the applause increased. Dawn smiled. The room went dark.

Dawn found a zipper somewhere and did with zippers what you will do with them when they are closed. Down went Dawn's robe. What she was wearing underneath was exactly what a stripper will wear under her sheath-like outer garment.

Spangles and tassles flashed in the light of the spot. Dawn danced. A spangle here and a tassel there was removed. There was more applause. I blushed for Dan Carboy. Dan could take it from there. I dove into my pants pockets and found the list of names. The next one was Mrs. Angel Martell, (nee Sally Benton), with an address in Philly. I looked up.

Dawn was down to red hair, skin and a G-string. I thought of Mrs. Martell.

"Angel!" she coo'd. "You're so stro-ong!"

She was a real tiny thing, but pretty. I sat in a room with lockers and a rubdown table. I was wearing trunks and a robe. I looked at my hands. They weren't taped. Either Angel Martell was a boxer with considerable time to go as yet before he was on, or he was a wrestler. I shuddered. I didn't know one damn thing about boxing or wrestling. Street fighting, yeah—but how the hell would street fighting help me here?

"Quit showing your muscles off to the little woman," a voice said. The voice belonged to a tired-looking little man with glasses.

I said, "Sure."

Little Sally pouted. "In fact, Mrs. Martell," the tired looking fellow told her, "it might be better if you find your seat out front now and wait for it to get underway. You're liable to make Angel nervous in here."

"Well, if you say so," she said doubtfully but timidly. She went to the door.

"Wait!" I called. I was going to ask her about Xlptl.

"Wait, nothing!" the man who must have been my manager said. "Out she goes."

The door closed behind Sally. I shuddered. I had to find out about Xlptl before I could leave her. Which meant I had to go through with whatever was waiting for me in the arena.

After a while my manager came over and taped my fists. So it was boxing, I thought. That was worse even than wrestling. In wrestling there was a script, and the participants followed it. In boxing I could—and probably would—get my head handed to me.

We went upstairs. The manager, still looking tired, didn't say a word. The arena was small, noisy, and smoke-filled. The ring seemed very close. Too close. We reached it too soon. I climbed through the ropes awkwardly, almost stumbling and falling across the ring. Someone hooted.

The other guy was already there, dancing in the resin corner. He looked very big and menacing. He was already wearing his gloves. My gloves were put on. There was a bell and some fighters in street clothes were trotted out to show off their padded muscles. There was another bell. I was sitting on a stool. A spotlight found me and my manager shoved me to my

feet. I lumbered to the center of the ring and heard a booming voice declaim:

"In this corner, that ever-popular slugger from the Bronx, New York, weighing two hundred and five pounds and undefeated in his last six thrilling contests with a record of fifteen knockouts in the last two years, Angel Martell!"

There was polite applause. I drifted back to my corner. I wondered where Sally was sitting. If I could just ask her about Xlptl before this thing got started... But I couldn't see her out there any place. The announcer continued.

"...this corner, the undefeated heavyweight from our own Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, who has knocked out all but two of his opponents in twenty-one stellar clashes here in this arena and elsewhere, Mickey Magoon!"

Magoon came out looking flashy and dancing and raising one hand in the victory sign. I looked around desperately for Sally. Maybe I'd seen her, I thought, shuddering. Maybe I'd forgotten what she looked like.

The referee gave us our instructions. We went back to our corners. A whistle sounded. My manager rubbed my back. A bell clanged and something propelled me toward the charging Magoon.

I put up my hands. Magoon danced around me cautiously. He jabbed and it didn't look like much but my head went shooting back and something made a noise in my neck. He jabbed again. He jabbed a third time. Then the jabs got blurry. I thought they would take my head clean off.

I clinched. The referee got us apart. Magoon came after me with that jab. I swung my left and right, but Magoon picked them off in air. I couldn't win and I knew it. I didn't have a chance. I wondered how long it would take before Magoon knew that too. Magoon was a pro. Once he learned it he wouldn't waste any time with caution. He would come in and cut me to ribbons. I'd be all right if I could keep him cautious, respectful, until I could find out what I had to about Sally and then look at the next address and give Angel Martell back his body....

The next address!

But the list wasn't here! How could the list be in my boxer shorts? The bathrobe? I wondered. I turned around to look at my corner.

Something clobbered my head and the next thing I

knew I was on my face on the canvas. There was a sound of thudding feet and a roar and then someone began to count. At five I got up to one knee. Magoon was in one corner, a neutral corner, banging his gloves together eagerly.

"Seven, eight..."

I got up. The crowd was very quiet. They sensed the kill now and were waiting for it. The referee rubbed my resin-powdered gloves against his shirt-front, then Magoon came tearing across the ring toward me. I backed into my own corner, then sidestepped desperately as Magoon came at me. He went by and whirled and we clinched and I saw my manager's face down there behind him and I opened my mouth to say, "Where's my bathrobe? See what you can find in the pockets, for gosh sakes!" But it came out all mumbled. I'd forgotten I was wearing the big, clumsy mouthpiece to protect my teeth.

Magoon swung at me. Somehow I eluded that blow. Maybe it was a reflex action on the part of Angel Martell's trained body. Magoon swung again. I walked into a clinch and he pounded my back and kidneys before the referee broke us apart. Magoon gave me a peculiar look then. I didn't understand the look. But I would soon.

He hit me in the chest. It wasn't much of a blow, and I countered with a flurry of lefts and rights. Magoon retreated. This surprised the hell out of me. I hooked my left and crossed my right and Magoon's knees wobbled. I hit him again and he bounced against the ropes. He came off them with a look of hate and rage in his eyes. He swung wildly three times with his right. The third one caught me flush in the mouth and I fell down, sprawling toward my own corner. I spit out the damn mouthpiece. The referee began to count.

"My robe!" I hollered to the manager. "Look in the pockets."

"You bum," he said.

"Huh?"

"You bum."

"Six, seven, eight, nine..."

I got to my feet. The bell rang before me and Magoon could get together again. I went to my corner. Suddenly behind my manager I saw Sally's worried face.

"You all right, honey?" she asked as I sat down. Someone squeezed a sponge of ice-cold water over my head. It made me shiver. Something was passed under my nose

with a strong smell. I gagged.

"You rat," said the manager. "You want to get us all killed?"

"What the devil's eating you?" I asked. I was taking the punishment out there, not him.

"Ha, ha, ha," he said.

"No. Tell me."

"Tell you. You know damn well you was supposed to go into the tank, to take a dive in the very first round. We got paid for it. We're gonna get paid a different way now, boy."

"Are you all right?" Sally asked.

"Mrs. Xlptl," I said in a low voice. I never thought it would be Sally.

But she whimpered: "Oh, you found me! You found me . . ." She sounded at once excited and disappointed.

"I'm not your husband," I said. "But I'm taking you back to him."

"I don't want to go back."

"Think about it. You ought to go back. He wants you back."

"What are you two talking about?" the manager shouted.

"I don't know what to say," Mrs. Xlptl told me.

"It's happened before, hasn't it? But you always went back."

"That's true. I—I—well, I guess you're right."

Just then the warning whistle sounded. I looked across the ring at Magoon. The manager said: "At least dive in this round, you louse. Maybe they'll only let us off with a warning."

I didn't say anything. A fixed fight, I thought. I felt pretty good now, as if the tricks learned by Martell had gone into the storehouse of his muscular knowledge, along with walking and running and talking and how to hold a spoon, and were coming out now for my own use.

"Don't forget," the manager pleaded. "You promised before the fight. Gee, this wouldn't be the first one you dumped for money."

Martell, I thought. You're some athlete. Suddenly I didn't like the body I was occupying. But I liked the man across the ring even less.

It was a fast and furious round. Magoon came out swinging from the bell. I felt my legs go wobbly. I was driven back into the ropes. I took a lot of punishment around the head and upper body. Then Magoon shifted his attack to the waist. I came in over it with a flurry of my own at his face. He backed up. I followed him. He caught

me with a looping right coming in and I went down to one knee. I rested there, taking a count of nine. I felt almost like a pro now. And if this Magoon had an unblemished record, I found myself thinking quite calmly, it was because other guys had gone into the tank for him. Oh, he was competent enough, but he wasn't another Marciano. Or even close.

I got up at nine. Magoon thought he had me. He came in with his hands low, ready to bring them up from his belt and finish me. The crowd was silent, waiting. I blocked a vicious right cross with my left glove. I swung my own right and it hit Magoon below the ear. I hooked my left at his other cheek. I brought the left down low, striking just under Magoon's heart. He spit his mouthpiece out. I hooked my left again and crossed my right. He swung back at me feebly. The crowd was roaring. I brought my right uppercutting at his jaw. His feet left the canvas and his whole body sank down on it, not falling, but slowly as if it were being lowered on strings.

He was counted out. The crowd screamed. The tired-looking manager held up my hand. He said nothing. We went back to the dressing room through throngs of well-wishers. They let little Sally come with us.

The door of the dressing room closed behind us. Two grim-looking characters were in there. They jerked their thumbs toward the door as if they were a team. The manager gulped and got out. I looked at Sally. Sally looked at me.

"You crossed us, Angel," one of the men said.

Martell had crossed them, all right. I could get out of this and leave Martell to take his medicine. But they'd beat him to a pulp before he knew what was happening. He was a rat, I thought, and he deserved what he got, but the least I could do was give him a little headstart. Then he could take it from there.

They came at me with blackjacks. Sally screamed. I brought up my forearm and one of the blackjacks blurred down toward it. My arm went numb. There was no pain. It just went suddenly dead.

The second blackjack numbed my other arm. They were very good at it, all right. They knew where to strike. I was a boxer without any arms to use . . .

A blackjack came down. I

bobbed out of the way. The other guy was behind me, raising his own blackjack. The first one hit him accidentally, crushing his shoulder. He screamed. I butted my head at the guy in front of me. It took the wind out of him. As he slumped I leaned over him and brought up my knee and it made a loud clicking sound as it struck his jaw and drove his teeth together. He fell down and he lay there.

The second guy was better now. He came at me with the blackjack. I backed off toward the rubdown table. My arms were beginning to tingle. I thought I might be able to use them if I had to. I leaned back on the rubdown table getting set to meet the blow. He lunged at me and I brought up my foot, smashing it against his chest. He staggered back. Sally stood to one side, her face white, her hand at her throat.

I followed the guy with the blackjack. He swung at me. He looked scared now. I ducked inside the blow and brought up my tingling right fist in a short, chopping blow. It threw his head back. He turned with a little whimper and got the hell out of there. His friend was still unconscious.

"Well, Mrs. Xlptl," I said, "shall we go?"

"I—I guess so. You were so strong! Even stronger than the real Martell. You were wonderful, really you were." She was small but very pretty. She had a funny look in her eyes. "That's what I like about Earthmen," she said. "They're so strong. They're so virile . . ."

She took my hand. We concentrated on getting out of there.

When I saw Mrs. Xlptl again, she wasn't little Sally. She was a shoulderless almost - human, penguin - like creature from somewhere. "So strong, so virile . . ." she said again. That look was in her new eyes.

It was a living room. I wished to hell Xlptl would come. I didn't like that look. I knew what she wanted. I wasn't buying now. I'd had enough for one day with almost scrubbing beautiful backs and watching strippers perform and almost getting clobbered and then having Mrs. Xlptl look at me that way, her eyes saying she wanted one final fling on Earth, in the person of a private eye named Brody.

And she wasn't going to give up easily. She moved to-

ward me, then stopped and looked down at herself. "It wouldn't be much fun with this—me—" She made a hopeless gesture.

I wanted to be polite. "But it was fun while it lasted."

"Yes. Maybe there's some way we could do it again—just once more before I go back—"

Her offer was tempting. I had to admit that. But things were different now. What was over was over and she had to understand. "No—no," I said. "You'll be happy back where you belong."

Her eyes flashed anger. "I belong here! With you! We can do it again!"

"Xlptl!" I called. "Hey, Xl—"

He came in. He went over to his wife. She sighed, looking disappointed.

"You're going back now?" I asked Xlptl as he paid me.

"Yes. And I have a souvenir."

I went outside. In the hall were two valises and something else. Xlptl had the right idea. He'd be able to keep his wife happy at home henceforth.

The something else was a set of barbells. **THE END**

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Irene gasped as her dress was snatched back into the other world.

Peter Merton's Private Mint

Your name is Merton and you find that all you have to do is reach into your safe to get money. The more you take, the more you find. And just when Quiggs has cut your future down to nothing. A wonderful discovery! Or is it? Of course it is. You'll be the richest man in the world. But will you?

By LEE ARCHER

PETER MERTON sat at his desk after the District Attorney's men left, and put his head in his hands. He was still sitting that way when Miss Irene Simmons came in.

"Here's the rest of the morning's mail, Mr. Merton," she said.

Merton didn't even look up. He was a young, good looking man in his late twenties, the type known as a "rising young executive"—possibly because that's exactly what he was. But he did not look young this morning. His interview with the D.A. had added years to his appearance. He felt old and haggard.

"Just put them on the desk," he said. His voice sounded tired.

She put the letters on the desk, but when she didn't leave immediately, Peter Merton looked up.

Irene Simmons was an average-sized girl with golden-brown hair, large blue eyes, a full, red mouth, and a lush figure. She looked as though she ought to be working as a bathing-suit model instead of as the private secretary to a vice-president of Crabley & Co.

"Does it look pretty bad, Mr. Merton?" she asked.

"It looks horrible," he said bleakly. "The D.A. said that since Quiggs has had four days to get away, the money is probably in South America by now." He put his hand over his eyes. "If only I hadn't been such a fool! Why did I put the money in my

office safe instead of in the company vault? Fifty thousand dollars! The insurance company won't pay, because the policy says that cash has to be kept in the vault.

"But how was I to know that Quiggs would come sneaking in here during Christmas vacation and take it out of my safe? He's been working for the company for years; who would have thought it?"

"Frankly, Mr. Merton, I think he was jealous because you were made a vice-president instead of him," Irene said firmly. "I think he wanted to ruin you."

"Well, he certainly has," Peter said sadly. "Old Man Crabley says that putting the money in my safe was criminal negligence. He says he wants me to pay it back or he'll see that I'm blackballed by every company in the business—after he fires me."

"I—I'm very sorry, Mr. Merton. I'm sure you'll think of something. The police may catch him, after all."

"Thank you, Miss Simmons. I hope so," Peter said. But his voice didn't hold much hope.

As the girl left the room, Peter absently watched the swaying of her hips as she walked, but he was too upset to appreciate the view fully. He had a serious problem to consider.

He thought over what she had said. So Quiggs had been jealous, eh? That probably explained the fact that he had left a five-dollar-bill in the safe. With his odd sense of humor, Quiggs had probably thought it very funny to leave a five note in place of the fifty thousand he had taken.

There was no doubt that it was Quiggs; the police were certain of the guilty person. Quiggs had been seen coming into the office on the Thursday night before Christmas vacation and had left only half an hour later. He had evidently taken the money out and replaced it with a bundle of wrapped paper. Some hours later, he had checked out of his apartment, and all trace of him had been lost.

Peter looked up at the Watteau print which concealed the heavy steel door of the wall safe. Five dollars lay behind it, all that was left of fifty thousand. He got up, walked over to the safe, twisted the combination, and pulled the door open. He reached in, took out the bill, and looked at it. And looked again, with wide eyes.

Because it wasn't a five-dollar-bill, at all.

It was a thin sheet of paper-like plastic, folded up to about the same size as a banknote.

Puzzled, Peter looked into the safe again. Nothing. He thrust his hand in and felt around. Still nothing. Except for the sheet of stuff he held in his hand, the safe was as empty as a church on Monday.

Unfolding the folded sheet, Peter saw that it was covered with print. The characters were oddly shaped, and the phraseology was queer, but it was unmistakably English.

Peter Merton sat on the edge of his desk and began to read.

Honorable Mister, Miss, or Missus:

To whoever you are in the Twentieth Century, we of the Thirtieth Century send greetings. We hope this epistle will be understandable; our knowledge of the language of English is maybe not as good as might be. Our studies of your time are somewhat hampered by lack of records, and it for this reason is that we contact you.

In order for the Time Transfer Field to work, it must be entirely surrounded by thick metal. Also a piece of similar material must be in place so that transfer can be effected, in accordance with the Vorish Equations.

If you wish to co-operate in this history-seeking venture, please place a note to such effect in your metal box.

Rolath Guelph
Terrestrial Bureau of
Historical Investigation

Peter frowned and read the thing again. Who would write such silliness? Could it be another joke by Quiggs? No, it couldn't be; he, Peter Merton, had put that five-dollar-bill back into the safe, and he hadn't left the room while it was in there.

He looked up at the open safe. It was still empty. Well, by golly, he'd see whether this was a hoax or not.

He pulled his gold-plated desk pen out of its crystal holder, took a piece of office stationery, and wrote:

Dear Mr. Guelph:

I'm very much interested in your proposition, but I would like to have you explain a little bit more about it.

Very truly yours,
Peter Merton

He folded it and put it in

the safe. Then he sat down and watched it. He watched it for fifteen minutes before he decided that nothing was going to happen. Finally, he walked over and took out the paper. It was the same as it had been when he put it in.

He looked back at the plastic sheet. Aha! It said: "In order for the Time Transfer Field to work, it must be surrounded entirely by thick metal."

He put the note back in, and this time he closed and locked the door.

Three minutes later, he opened it again. This time, there was another folded sheet of plastic. It said:

Dear Mr. Merton:

Understanding Time Transfer is very simple. Of course, the science of your time would be unable to build such a machine, but what happens is essentially this: If you put something in your metal box, we can pick it up and bring it to our time. However, there must be an equivalent exchange of matter, so we have to send something to your century, too. This must be done in accordance with the Law of Entropy.

What we need mostly are historical documents; newspapers, books, and magazines of your era. Please send only factual material; no fiction. We will want fiction later, but not now.

Here is a list of things we would like to have.

Peter read down the list and blinked in amazement at some of the things.

The letter ended with: *In return for this, we will send an equal weight of some of our old museum pieces of paper. Papers like the one we took from you; things called "money." Will this be satisfactory? Here is a sample.*

Yours very truly,
Rolath Guelph.

Money? Peter looked at the bill that was enclosed. It was a five-hundred-dollar-note! And they said they would exchange pound for pound! That meant that for one pound of old newspapers, he would get one pound of banknotes!

It sounded screwy, but Peter Merton was not a man to argue. If it worked, fine; if it didn't, what could he lose?

Peter jammed his hat on his head, folded the list and the five hundred dollars in his pocket, and strode out the door. He stopped in the outer

office at the desk of Miss Simmons, who was typing up some letters.

"Come along, Miss Simmons," he said. "Get your hat; we have some things to do."

Miss Simmons looked startled, but she did as she was bid. Fifteen minutes later, they were in a second-hand book shop on Sixth Avenue.

Peter squinted at the list in the dim light. "I want *The Story of English* by Mario Pei," he said to the proprietor, "and *The Story of Language* by the same author. Give me a copy of the memoirs of Winston Churchill, the—"

He went on like that for several minutes, and the pile of books in front of him began to grow. Then he browsed through the magazine section, looking for back issues of *Life, Time,* and *Scientific American.*

He told Miss Simmons to get a taxi, and they began loading the stuff in the back seat. Then they drove to the New York *Times* building and got back issues of the past year. With all this loot, they drove back to the offices of Crabley & Co.

It was during the ride back that Peter wondered whether it was possible that the people of the future had stolen the money that Quiggs had been blamed for and replaced it with a bundle of paper. But he shook his head. It couldn't be. The bundle had been made of cut-up newspapers, and, besides, they had Quiggs's fingerprints all over them.

Miss Simmons helped him get the stuff into his office, and then she said: "Mr. Merton, I don't like to butt into your business, but may I ask what all this literature is for?"

Grinning happily, Peter Merton swore the girl to secrecy, then he told her what had happened. As he finished the story, Miss Simmons began to edge slowly toward the door.

"—and so, I had to get these books and things. They're evidently doing research into history. These are books they've lost, somehow. Imagine what it would be like if our historians could get copies of the books that were burned at the Library of Alexandria, and— Just a minute! Where are you going, Miss Simmons?"

Miss Simmons smiled a sickly smile. "Oh, *nowhere!* Are you sure you feel all right, Mr. Merton?"

"Do I feel—" Peter looked blank. "Oh! I see. You think I've gone off my rocker. Well, we'll see. Maybe I have, but I don't think so. Look; I'll prove it to you."

He scribbled a note to Rolath Guelph and put it inside the safe with a couple of the books. Then he closed the safe. He waited three minutes and opened it again.

Irene Simmons' eyes opened wide in astonishment, and her mouth formed a crimson O. Tumbling out of the safe came sheaf after sheaf of banknotes.

"*Now* do you believe me?" Peter asked triumphantly.

"Y—yes. What else can I believe? Are they real?"

He picked one of the bills up and looked at it closely. "It's real, all right. I started out in business as a bank teller, and I know how to tell a counterfeit. This is the real McCoy, all right."

"Well — well, my goodness!" was all Miss Simmons could say for a moment. Then, after the shock of seeing all that money had lessened a little, she asked: "What are you going to do with it, Peter?"

"The first thing I'm going to do," he said, "is return that fifty thousand dollars to Mr. Crabley. Here, help me gather this stuff up and sort it out into piles. We'll have to count it, too."

The girl pitched in willingly and began to sort the bills. Swiftly they separated it.

It was not until then that Peter Merton realized that the girl had called him by his first name. Was it the sight of all the money that had done it? Irene Simmons had never impressed him as the gold-digger type, but—

Peter shrugged and went on stacking the money.

When they had finished, Irene said: "There's not quite enough to pay back Mr. Crabley."

"That's easily fixed," Peter said, grinning.

He put in some more books, closed the safe, and waited. When he opened it again, more money came tumbling out. This time, there was enough to pay back the Old Man and more besides.

Peter sorted out a pile of the larger bills, enough to make fifty thousand, and marched to Mr. Crabley's office.

The engraving on the door said:

J. J. CRABLEY
PRESIDENT

He rapped deferentially, and when a voice said:

"Come in!" Peter did exactly that.

Old Man Crabley looked just like his name. He was a small, wizened, crab-faced man with yellowed skin and a totally bald head.

"Well, sir! What is it this time?" he crackled.

Peter began pulling the money out of the briefcase he had packed it in, in order to carry it to the Old Man's office.

"I brought you the money, sir," Peter said. "You'll find it all there; fifty thousand dollars."

The Old Man's eyes lit up with pleasure. Peter could almost see the green glow of money in them.

"Excellent," said Mr. Crabley. "So the police caught the thief, hey? He'll get twenty years for this."

"No, sir," Peter replied. "They haven't caught Quiggs yet, and they haven't found the money. This is out of my —ah—my savings."

The Old Man's scraggly brows shot up. "Indeed? Savings? I didn't know you actually had that much. Hmmm. Well. Mmmm." He rubbed his hands together and frowned. "Well, this is really quite handsome of you, young man. You have more brains than I credited you with. Hmmm." He took out a letter opener and toyed with it. Finally, he said: "Peter, my boy, I'll tell you: I really didn't mean that you should do this; I was simply trying to throw a scare into you. I'll tell you what I'm going to do, my boy; I'm going to place this to your account with the firm. Henceforth, you are a junior partner of Crabley & Company, to the tune of fifty thousand dollars.

"In addition, I'll have Mr. Twythe, the firm's lawyer, draw up a paper which will give you all rights to whatever money is recovered from Quiggs by the police."

Peter started to say something, but Old Man Crabley just patted the air with a hand. "Tut, tut, my boy; think nothing of it. Any young man who can save a sum like that at your age deserves extra consideration. I have always admired a man who can make money."

Peter thanked Mr. Crabley as best he could and then he strolled back to his office feeling a rosy glow.

During the following two weeks, Peter Merton's personal fortune grew by leaps and bounds. Most of the cash he kept in a trunk in his apartment; he knew that peo-

ple would start to ask questions if he put too much of it in the bank at once. But he did put considerable sums in the bank, nonetheless.

The savings account was practically forced on him by Irene Simmons. She insisted that, even if he did have money in his trunk, it was conceivable that someone might steal it. Meanwhile, he bought a new Cadillac, several tailor-made suits at two hundred and fifty per, a fur coat for Irene, and had his apartment completely redecorated, with built-in bar complete.

He became quite friendly with Irene Simmons, but he was convinced that the girl liked him simply because he had plenty of money. That didn't bother him too much; she was a beautiful girl, and Peter Merton had always had an eye for beauty.

It was in the middle of the third week that things began to change. The first thing that happened was a note from Peter's futurian correspondent, Rolath Guelph.

Dear Mr. Merton, it read. *You have been most co-operative in this endeavor, and we appreciate it greatly. Your books have been very welcome, and have strengthened our knowledge of your times and language tremendously.*

Now, however, we would like a few artifacts of your civilization. Would you please send us samples of your clothing, both men's and women's styles? We would also appreciate various other things, such as . . .

And here there followed another long list, similar to the one he had received before, except that it called for various manufactured objects.

The letter was signed, as usual, *Very truly yours, Rolath Guelph.*

"Well, what do you think of that?" Peter said, after reading it.

Irene read it and said: "I have a dress I can send him, and you can send him one of your suits."

Peter nodded. "We'll have to buy some of these other things, though."

An hour later, Peter stuffed a suit into the wall safe and closed the door. When he opened it, there was a small bundle of thin, strong material which, when unfolded, proved to be a suit—of sorts. It certainly looked different.

Irene giggled when he held it out. "You couldn't wear that on the streets. It looks

like something out of Flash Gordon or Buck Rogers."

Peter grinned and put in Irene's dress. What he got back was a dress, but this time Irene didn't giggle when it was unfolded.

"Why, that's perfectly *gorgeous,*" she said, in awe. "I wonder if it'll fit?"

"Here," said Peter, handing it to her. "Go find out. You can lead the fashion field—by a century to be exact."

Irene took the dress and headed for the ladies' powder room. When she came back, it was all Peter could do to keep his eyes from popping out.

On Irene, the rich, iridescent material made her look like a queen out of a Technicolor extravaganza.

"Wow!" said Peter feelingly. "It's too bad they don't have suits I can wear."

"I'll show you something else, too," Irene said excitedly. "I accidentally spilled some water on it in the powder room, and look what happened!" She proceeded to demonstrate by pouring water on her skirts from the carafe on Peter's desk. The water rolled off without wetting the material. Then she took the desk pen and shook some ink on it. "See?" she chortled, "it rolls right off! It never has to be cleaned, because it can't get dirty!"

Peter looked back at the Buck Rogers suit. "Maybe I can get a tailor to make a decent suit out of that thing."

Irene shook her head. "I don't think so. There aren't any seams."

Peter frowned and took a pair of scissors from his desk drawer. He took one sleeve of the suit and tried to cut it. It wouldn't cut. He jabbed at it with the point. The suit stubbornly refused to cut, snag, or tear.

"I wonder," he then said thoughtfully, "if this Rolath Guelph would have a suit made for me; one that I could wear." He scribbled out a note and put it in with the next batch of stuff.

The reply came back almost immediately.

I can't promise anything, Mr. Merton, but I'll see what I can do. R. G.

"Well, that's that," sighed Peter. "I'll just have to wait."

Another week passed, and Peter got no word from Rolath Guelph. He did, however, get word from another group of men.

He was sitting comfortably in his office, pondering on

what to do with all his money, when the intercom on his desk buzzed.

"There are some gentlemen from the Treasury Department to see you, Mr. Merton," said Irene's voice. She sounded scared.

"Send them in," Peter said. Come to think of it, he felt a little uneasy, himself.

The two brisk, official-looking young men who came into the office identified themselves as Mr. Brady and Mr. Brown, of the United States Treasury Department. They wasted no time in getting down to business.

"Now, Mr. Merton," said Brady, "we'd like to know how you're getting all this money."

"Well, ah—um—I saved it," he said.

"That's not what I meant," said Brady. "I'm talking about several counterfeit bills that have been traced to you. Where did you get them?"

"But they *can't* be counterfeit," Peter protested. "They are perfectly good bills!"

"Oh, they're good imitations, all right," Brown said. "The most amazing fakes I've ever seen. The paper is perfect, the engraving is beautiful; in fact, the only thing wrong is the serial numbers. Why, some of those numbers won't be printed on bills for twenty or thirty years yet."

"Now, Mr. Merton," said Brady, "tell us where the plates are. Who printed these amazing phonies?"

"I don't know," Peter said. "I — I — " he stammered. Frightened, he didn't know what to say. He was afraid to tell them about Rolath Guelph and the Time Transfer; they'd think he was crazy.

"It won't do you any good to lie, Mr. Merton," said Brown. "We got a search warrant this morning and went through your apartment. We found the trunk full of money in your closet. Some of the boys are going over them now, down at the Treasury Office."

Peter Merton gulped and said nothing. He couldn't; there was a lump in his throat the size of a grapefruit.

"Well," Brady said, "if you won't tell us, I'm afraid we'll just have to take you in. Come along, Mr. Merton."

Still speechless, Peter walked out of the office between the two men.

Peter Merton was sitting in a cell with his head in his hands when he heard the

clicking of high heels down the corridor, followed by the heavy tread of a guard's feet.

It was Irene. "I got a lawyer for you, Peter," she said breathlessly as she came up to the cell door.

The guard leaned against the wall and inspected his fingernails. "I don't think he needs a lawyer, lady. What he needs is a goof-doctor. He's flipped his cookie."

Peter managed a faint grin. "I told 'em how I got the money," he said. "They think I'm nuts."

"But, Peter," she said, "*why* would Rolath Guelph send counterfeit money?"

"He didn't," Peter said. "Don't you see? He got all that money out of a museum. There's probably bills there that were printed in every century for the next thousand years. He just sent some bills that won't be printed for twenty years yet."

"Well, don't you worry, I'll do something to get you out," she said. "Couldn't we take them up to the office and show them how it works?"

"I don't know. Maybe. But Brady said that even if I were telling the truth they'd have to take all the money away from me."

"I don't care about the money," Irene said. "All I care about is getting you out of this horrible place."

Suddenly, a door opened at the far end of the corridor, and there were more footsteps. It was Brady and Brown, followed by a man Peter had never seen before.

The stranger was saying: "—after all, it's only fair that my client be allowed to prove his story, no matter how fantastic it is."

"He'll get a chance," Brady said sharply.

The stranger turned out to be Q. Bertram Leslie, the lawyer that Irene had engaged.

"All right," Brown said to the guard, "let him out. We'll take over." Then he looked at Peter. "We're going up to your office, Merton, to give you a chance to prove this screwy story you've been telling us about a time machine. I know it's going to be a waste of time, but justice is justice. Come along."

It was after six o'clock when they arrived at the offices of Crabley & Company, and the office suite was deserted. Irene let the officers in with a key, and they went back to Peter's private office.

"Okay," said Brady, "there is your magic safe; do your stuff."

As Peter began working the combination, Brown said: "By the way, Merton, you'll be interested to know that the Brazilian police have picked up this guy, Quiggs, who stole the fifty thousand from you. He claimed he opened the package and there was nothing but a bunch of plastic in it. But the Brazilian cops think they've got a lead on it."

Peter paid no attention. He wasn't interested in Quigg's crime right now, he was only interested in his own. He swung open the door and looked inside. There was a folded note from Rolath Guelph. He opened it and looked.

"Oh, *no!*" he said weakly. He sat down in a chair.

Brady took the note from his hand and read:

Dear Mr. Merton,

We of the Terrestrial Bureau of Historical research want to extend to you our warmest thanks for your cooperation. We now have most of the information we want about your era. With the valuable information you have given us, we will be able to do a great deal more research, and will have much better success in pinpointing our future contacts.

It is too bad we could not meet in person, but it is impossible to transfer living things through time. Rest assured that your name will go down in history books as one of our most valuable contacts.

The Transfer Field will be shut off as soon as you receive this note. Naturally, a reversal of transfer will occur.

With our warmest wishes,
Rolath Guelph.

Brady looked up at Peter with what could well be called a jaundiced eye. He said. "Did you think this would get you off the hook? How stupid do you think we are? Phony bills, a phony story, phony letter—Merton, you're just plain phony, all the way through. Come on along; it's back to the hoosegow for you. And this time, try—"

It is difficult to say what Brady might have suggested that Peter try, for he never finished the sentence. He was interrupted by a sudden roar of sound that reminded him of a broken steam pipe. Suddenly, the air was filled with books, magazines, papers, clothing, shoes, ash trays, cigarettes, pencils, pens, candy, sandwiches, and a thousand and one other things, all spewing from the

safe like water out of a fire hose.

Amid the confusion Peter saw Irene running for the door, clad only in the sheerest of bra and panties.

"Where is Brady?" shouted Brown. "Why did that girl run off? What happened?"

"I'm not sure what happened," Peter said, "but Irene had a perfectly good reason for running off. And as for Brady—"

He pointed toward the tremendous heap of stuff on the floor.

One hand was groping feebly from its center.

Irene sipped at her coffee, while Peter, sitting across the cafe table, explained to her.

"Of course they didn't have a case against me without evidence, and when all the money vanished, they had no evidence. So they had to let me go."

"But I don't see exactly why the things vanished," Irene said. "What happened to my beautiful dress? That was terribly embarrassing!"

But very beautiful, Peter thought. "Well, as near as I can figure out, this Time Transfer business only works so long as the time field is working. As soon as they shut it off, everything went back to its proper time. All the things we gave them came back to us, and all the money, and your dress, and the other gadgets we got went back to the Thirtieth Century, where they belonged."

"It's a shame, in a way," Irene said. "We could have used that trunkful of money to get married on."

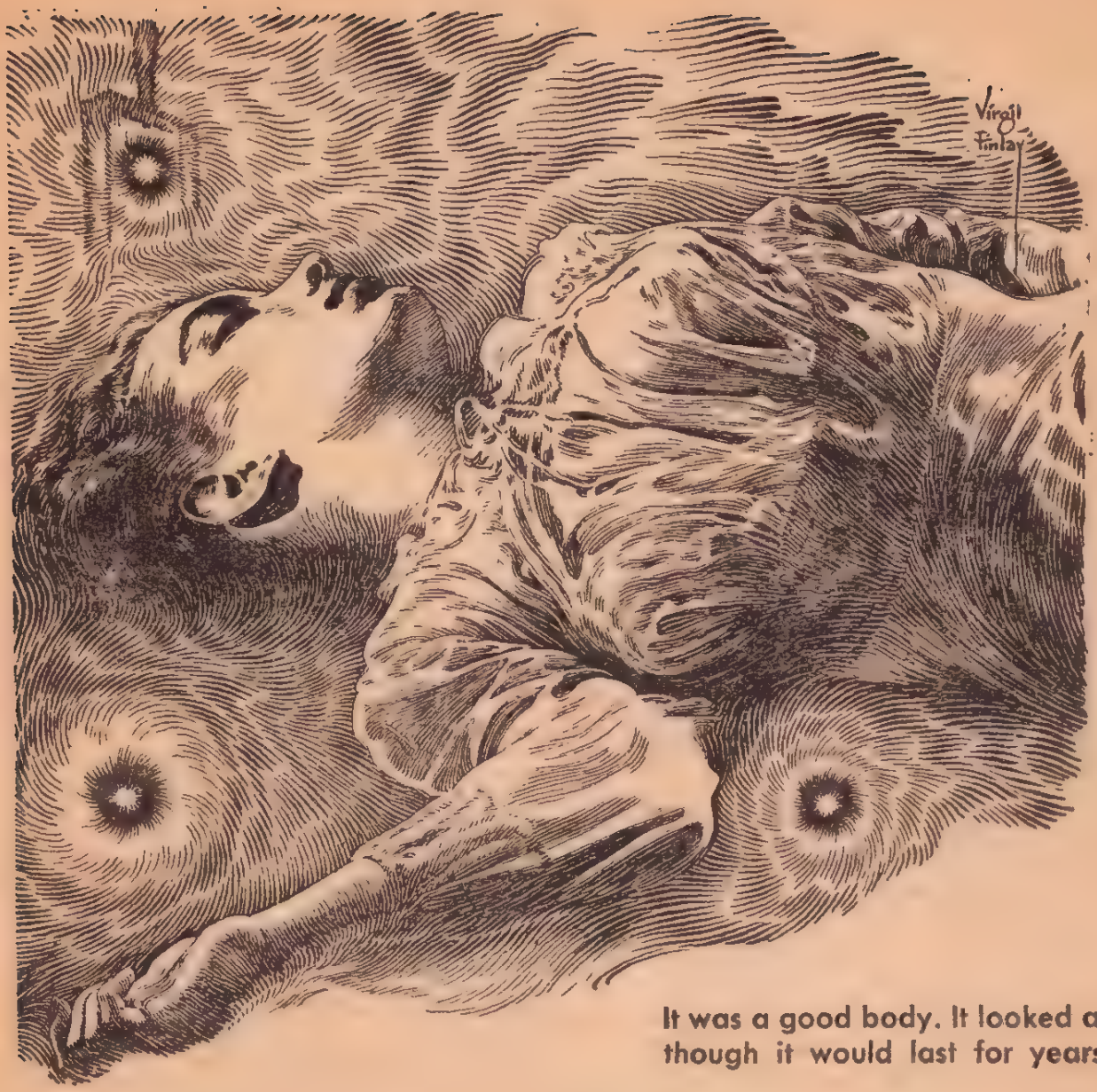
Peter's grin broadened. "Don't worry about that. Remember, Old Man Crabley gave me the right to keep any money that was recovered from Quiggs."

"Did you get it?" Irene asked excitedly. "Did Quiggs tell where he hid it?"

Peter shook his head. "Nope. He didn't steal it. I found the money in that pile of stuff in my office.

"Evidently, Rolath Guelph was trying out his machine and took the bundle of money and replaced it with another bundle of that queer plastic paper of his. When Quiggs sneaked in, he just stole the bundle from the Thirtieth Century and he put a third bundle in. He got all the way to Brazil before he opened the package and found out he didn't have anything."

"Fifty thousand dollars," Irene said dreamily. "Well, that ought to be enough to start on, anyway." **THE END**



It was a good body. It looked as though it would last for years.

The Girl From Bodies, Inc.

THE GIRL FROM BODIES, INC.

By LEONARD G. SPENCER

It's a darned shame that just when we get past the experimental stage and learn how to have fun, the old body starts wearing out. Now what if there were spare parts for sale? What if you could get them installed on demand? A new heart, a new liver, a new — well, just suppose!

"THE trouble with bodies," said the new rub-down specialist at the Gotham Baths, "is that after a while they just wear out."

"Glmph," said Hugh Horner as the skin-sleeking oil was applied liberally to his face, making a drawn-out reply impossible.

"Ain't it funny, though," the rub-downer said, "how you can buy a new set of piston rings for your car or a mainspring for your wristwatch or a new gizmo for the old lady's mix-master, but you can't even buy a new appendix, if you should need one, for yourself."

The quick hands left Horner's face and began to knead the sagging muscles in his pectoral region. "If you look at it that way," Horner said, "you have a point." He was alone in the massage room with the attendant. He felt worn and drained out, as he always did at the end of a heavy week's work at the office. A steam bath and a massage helped, but he had to admit it: he wasn't as young as he used to be.

"Of course I have a point, Mr. Horner," said the attendant. "Folks spent all that money on machines, what I mean, and almost nothing on themselves. Tell me what happens when a guy develops a bad ticker— Wait, I'll tell you what happens. He sits somewhere in a soft chair, on a porch maybe, sucking on a dry pipe and waiting for the next attack, which will probably kill him."

"I've heard pleasanter

talk," Hugh Horner said in sudden distaste.

"What's the matter? Afraid of the truth?"

"Now really!" said Horner.

"How old are you, Mr. Horner? Forty-five?"

"I'm forty-seven," Horner admitted. His age, thus objectively stated in his own voice, came as a mild shock. Forty-seven! He was virtually middle-aged.

"Forty-seven! How many years before you change the car's battery?"

"Why, two or three, I guess."

"The tires?"

"Every twenty-five thousand miles. That would be about three years."

The attendant leaned down over him, still kneading the flesh of his chest. "How much you got in the bank, Mr. H.?" he asked in a tight whisper.

"I don't see where that's any business of yours," Horner replied in a shocked voice.

"You get a car on time, it's the finance company's business, isn't it? You take out a mortgage, it's the bank's business—right?"

"Yes, but—"

"How much, then?"

"Well, er, six thousand dollars."

"Joint account with your wife?"

"Y-yes."

"Happily married?"

"Now, just a minute!"

"Are you or aren't you?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"You suppose so!"

"Yes, I'm happily married. Naturally, Jane isn't exactly the same girl she was twenty years ago, when we were married. She's put on some weight and she's got wrinkles and she's not exactly a sweater girl—"

"I see. Any children?"

"No, we were never blessed—"

"Blessed, is it? Well, that's good. No children. I think you'll do, Mr. Horner."

"Do? Do for what?"

"Congratulations, sir," the rub-down man said, smacking some oil on Horner's abdomen and squashing the flesh around to show Horner how soft he'd become.

Horner said, "Say, what happened to George, anyway." George was Horner's usual attendant at the Gotham Baths.

"George wised up. He's out getting a body job."

"Oh, something happen to George's car?"

"Not his car."

"I'm afraid I don't understand."

"He's getting a body job,"

said the attendant. "He's getting a new body."

The hands went slap-slap against Horner's abdomen. He could hear the attendant's heavy, regular breathing. "Ha-ha," he said. "You're pulling my leg."

"I just now explained—"

"You said George was out getting a new body. That's a joke, isn't it?"

"It's no joke to George. It's costing him four thousand dollars, all the money he has. But he thinks it's worth it. Wouldn't you?"

"A new, er, body, you mean?"

"Yes. To start life at age twenty-five again, aware of all your mistakes, your shortcomings, your—"

"All right," Horner said finally, "that's enough. I've been lying here and listening because I've had no choice, understand? But you've worn that joke out, fellow. I wish you'd stop."

The masseur mumbled something under his breath, then said, "Well, that does it on the front side. Care to roll over?"

"Yes," said Horner dutifully, and did so. He thought: funny, the way this bird delivered that new body pitch. Such a straight face. So utterly serious, almost as if he were interviewing me. The silence stretched. Horner regretted having asked the attendant to stop his yarn about new bodies. He finally said, in defeat, "Er, about what you were saying—"

"You want an appointment? That's what I'm here for."

"An appointment? With whom?"

The attendant wiped his hands on a large towel and tossed its twin to Horner. From somewhere, he plucked a neat white business card and gave it to Horner. The card said:

BODIES, INC. *By appointment only.*

There was a telephone number and an address out on Long Island. There was nothing else.

"Three thousand is what it will cost you," the attendant said. "You're lucky it's a joint account you have."

"Three thousand dollars!" gasped Horner. "For what?"

"For a new body, naturally. Twenty-five years old and in sound health. Fit as a pin, you're guaranteed that. I think it's a bargain."

"But three thousand dollars—"

"What kind of car you drive?"

Horner told him.

"Buy it brand new?"

"I never buy second-hand cars," Horner told him haughtily.

"Then it cost you damn near as much as a new body is going to. What are you complaining about?"

Horner clucked an answer and then was told he could go to the locker room and climb into his clothing. He tipped the usual fifty cents, showered, dressed in his street clothing. He did all this, trying not to think about what he had heard—but the more he tried not to think about it, the more he did think about it.

Calling himself a fool, he returned to the massaging rooms. He poked his head inside the room in which the new man had given him a rubdown.

An attendant with a stocky build and shell-rimmed glasses stared out at him, squinted myopically, and smiled. "Evening, Mr. Horner," he said.

It was George, who had given Horner his weekly massage every week for the past five years—except tonight.

"Why, you're here!" blurted Horner.

"Sure am, sir. Wondered why you were late. Go ahead and undress, now. I'll reserve your usual table . . ."

"But I just had my massage."

"Oh?" said George, trying to make his voice sound indifferent. "Trying one of the other masseurs?"

"Not at all," snapped Horner. "You weren't here. Well, were you?"

"Never even stepped out. Been here all night," George said.

"But the other man, the new man—"

"No new man, Mr. Horner, sir. Haven't put on a new man in six-seven months. I'd know, wouldn't I?"

"You'd know," said Horner slowly, after a silence.

"Something the matter, sir?"

"It's nothing. Nothing."

Horner got out of there very quickly. He took a cab home, which was unusual for him. If George and his nameless friend had been playing an elaborate practical joke, they had also been playing hob with Horner's digestion. For now a hot sensation flooded his middle — his damned ulcer acting up. Ulcers, he thought with a sudden wry smile, ulcers and what else? You're forty-sev-

en, Horner. A mildly successful life, a good marriage, a middling business, no children, no outstanding debts—any regrets?

Yes, Horner thought. Regrets. His ulcer was a regret. He had to be careful what he ate, couldn't drink much. His rising blood pressure would one day be a regret, even if it wasn't yet. And generally, vaguely, his insignificance was a regret. He was not a meek man, but he was no Tarzan of the Apes. He was not a small man, but he was no Goliath. He was not a lowbrow, but he was no Einstein. He was not without an eye and some appeal for women, but he was no Don Juan. He sighed, knowing you could extend the list indefinitely. Hugh Horner, small businessman. Hugh Horner, small man.

"Here's your address, Mac," the cab driver said.

Horner got up with a start. He realized he had been sitting there for some time with the cab perfectly still. He somehow sensed that time had passed, more time than the thirty-odd minutes it would take a cab to deliver him to his home on the other side of the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel.

"Where—where are we?" he asked the cabbie. For some reason, he fingered the business card in his pocket. The one the new masseur, the masseur who apparently did not exist, had given him.

The cabbie, shrugging, told him an address which was not immediately familiar. Then, with a sudden quickening of his heart, Horner realized it was the address on the business card in his pocket.

"You mean," Horner demanded, "we're on Long Island? I don't remember telling you to take me here."

"Well, I didn't dream it up myself, Mac," the cabbie said. "Look, I don't care if you get out or you don't get out. The flag is still down and I'm still making money. So, what'll it be?"

"I ought to call my wife," Horner said.

The driver shrugged. "You getting off here?"

Slowly, Horner nodded. He looked outside. He saw night darkness, a dimly lit driveway, a hemlock hedge twelve feet high.

"Sign said 'Positively no vehicles,'" the cabbie told him. "So I guess you walk from here."

"I guess I walk," Horner said. He consulted the taxi meter, took four dollar bills from his money clip and a

half dollar in change from his pocket. Then he got out.

The cab door closed. The driver put the clutch down, then up, and the cab rolled away into the darkness. Horner lit a cigarette. It tasted harsh and bitter, stale. The darkness engulfed him and a pulse hammered, of all places, in his right leg. He felt all at once old—or at least aging. He sighed and it was not a sound a young man would make. In the darkness on the unknown road, he longed for his youth, his lost youth. Then he walked resolutely up the dimly lit driveway flanked by the high hemlock hedge.

The door-knocker was brass, and Horner let it fall. It made a resounding noise and the door opened within a second, as if someone were standing half a foot away on the other side with no job but to admit Hugh Horner the instant he knocked.

"Come in, Mr. Horner," the girl said. "Naturally, we were expecting you."

She was tall and she wore a cashmere sweater, loose but not so loose that it failed to reveal high, maidenly breasts. She wore a skirt not provocatively tight, but tight enough to suggest the good thighs that she had. Her hair fell almost to her shoulders in abundant auburn waves. She had a lovely face and Horner thought she was about twenty years old.

"You were expecting me?" Horner said.

"Of course. You see, *Bodies, Inc.* carefully screens its applicants. . . ."

"But I didn't apply!"

"Ah, but we knew you were going to. We have to be sure of our clients. Because if a single client decided to talk, we'd be out of business."

"The authorities?"

"Certainly. But since you're here, we can get down to business at once. You have the three thousand dollars with you?"

"Why, no. No, I don't."

"Bankbook?"

"Yes, I have that."

"It's good enough. Tomorrow we can take your identification papers, driving license and so forth, and get the money ourselves. That is, unless they know you personally at the bank?"

Horner said that he did his banking by mail. He supposed they were going to forge his signature, but made no comment because he had decided, all at once, to call the whole thing off.

"See here," he said. "This

is a little awkward. But you can trust me not to talk."

"What's a little awkward?"

"I—I've decided not to go through with it," Horner said lamely. "My wife, my friends . . ."

The girl said nothing. She took two steps forward, placed her arms around Horner, and kissed him. She wore a subtle perfume. She was beautiful. Her lips were soft and warm, inviting. Her lips were hot. Her lips burned. . . .

Horner broke away breathlessly. His heart was pounding. He knew his face was flushed, he could feel it. His legs were unsteady. He wanted to respond, but his energies were dissipating in the hard-pumping heart, the trembling limbs, the flushed face. It was a middle-aged response. It lacked the drive and direction of youth.

"Did you like that?" the girl asked, taking one of Horner's hands and holding it.

"Yes," came his breathless reply. "Oh, yes! I liked it."

"But you didn't . . ."

"Respond? I have a wife."

"That wasn't the reason."

"We're happily married!"

"And I like this sweater I'm wearing very much, but I have others and will wear others."

"The mores of our society . . ."

"Mores baloney! You were just plain scared. Middle-aged scared. Look at you. You're soft and you're getting wrinkles. Do you think I was really attracted to you? Do you think that's why I kissed you? No, you fool. That wasn't the reason."

"Then you . . ."

"Wanted to make this point. Wanted to show you you're old, too old to enjoy the most obvious pleasures of a younger man's life. Twenty-five, Mr. Horner! That's the age! The age not of boyishness but of mature youth! Twenty-five! The perfect age for you, and you know it." She smiled at him. It was a deliberately sexy smile, a come-on, an invitation which Horner, under the circumstances, had to decline. "Are you convinced?" she said.

"That I'm not as young as I used to be? Of course."

She gave him a deliberately daughterly kiss, pecking at his temple with her soft warm lips. "Then you're ready to go to the observation room."

The observation room, thought Horner. Did he do the observing, or was he ob-

served? He sighed. It was not a young man's way of expressing what Hugh Horner felt. He knew it was not. He said slowly, bleakly, "I'm ready for the observation room."

The girl did not even nod. She had known he would be ready all along.

It was a small, utterly bare room with three walls of dull gray metal and the fourth of dazzling floor-to-ceiling glass. On the other side of the glass was a similar room—except that it was furnished with a single bench running across its length.

Men were seated on the bench. Young men, apparently staring at Horner and his lovely companion.

"They can't see us," the girl explained. "One way glass."

"But do they, er, know why they are here?"

"Naturally. Everything's on the up-and-up with *Bodies, Inc.*, morally if not legally."

"And they are . . ."

"Your choice, Mr. Horner. As you can see, there are eight young men in there, each twenty-five years old, each guaranteed in good health, each perfectly willing to switch identities with you. I must tell you in advance, however, that the switch is quite permanent. There is no recourse. You understand?"

"Yes, but . . ." Horner looked at the eight men who could not see him, and lapsed into silence. The eight all looked like sound specimens, all right. All seemed healthy and alert, even cheerful. Horner said, somewhat suspiciously, "My reason for wanting to switch places is obvious. And theirs?"

The girl licked her lips before she spoke. They were very nice lips. They were delicious lips. Horner had tasted them. He was suddenly reminded of a magician who makes diverting passes with one hand while performing his magic with the other. "Money," the girl said laconically.

"Money? But I'm only paying three thousand dollars. Surely a man wouldn't surrender his youth for such a sum!"

"Our regulations call for a man's total savings. In your case, three thousand dollars. But most of our clients are extremely wealthy, Mr. Horner. Now, since half of the fee goes to the youth who will become Hugh Horner while we keep the other half . . ."

"But fifteen hundred dollars only!"

"I should have said it goes into a pool. A yearly pool, you see. The average last year was four-hundred sixty-five thousand dollars, Mr. Horner. Don't you think some young men would be willing to surrender twenty years of their lives for half a million dollars?"

"I wouldn't if I were young," Horner said at once.

"Between you and me, that's because you aren't. But it's their choice to make, and it's a free choice. Now, have you made a selection?"

Horner looked at the eight men again, and shrugged.

"I see," the girl said. "And I agree. They're all choice specimens, is that what you're thinking? All strong, all healthy, and all will probably be in better shape than you are, twenty years from now."

"Do I get some kind of a guarantee on their health? I mean, what if . . . if I should pick one of them with an incurable disease or something?" Although he asked this very practical question, Horner still hardly expected to go through with anything as incredible as switching bodies with one of the young men on the other side of the glass partition. After all, he told himself for the tenth time, such things just weren't possible. This was either an elaborate joke or an elaborate dream. He decided — hopefully — that it was the latter. He recalled that the doctor had given him reserprine to calm his nerves recently, and the doctor had told him that one of the side effects of reserprine was an abundance of nightmare.

"That's it," he said. "Reserprine."

"What did you say?" the girl asked him, an amused look on her face.

"Er, I said, that one's fine," Horner blurted, pointing at random at one of the men on the other side of the glass partition.

"Good," the girl said. "Then everything is ready." She touched a section of the wall and the dazzling glass sheet abruptly went opaque. This lasted for some five seconds, then the wall became transparent again.

All but one of the men had disappeared. Horner assumed it was the individual he had singled at quite at random.

"Now really . . ." he began.

"Look at me," the girl said.

That was easy. She was beautiful.

Her eyes grew very large. Incredibly large. They filled her entire head. They filled the room. They were two enormous blue pits. Horner jumped into both of them just before he fell into a deep hypnotic sleep.

His hands were raw and bleeding. His first thought was that the guards would know something was wrong when they saw his hands. He was down on his knees in foul-smelling dirt, but his head scraped the low ceiling. He was digging mechanically with his bare hands. He had had a shovel, but it had been lost in a slight cave-in.

"Hey, Lonnie!" a harsh whispering voice called. "Stop dreaming, for cryin' out loud. If we don't do it tonight, we'll never get another chance. Forbish is out."

"What do you mean he's out?" called back Horner, whose name now seemed to be Lonnie.

"You know what I mean. Out. Another cell block. Forbish got a mouth like the Holland Tunnel. What I mean, if he ain't here to cash in on the deal, he's gonna spill it. And fast. How you comin'?"

"I'm digging," Horner responded. "I'm digging . . . and digging." He was doing that, all right. The work should have been tremendously tiring, should have exhausted Hugh Horner in his run-down forty-seven-year-old body. But he found it almost exhilarating. He looked at his hands. Dirty hands, and bloody. But large—larger than they should have been. Horner had had small hands, almost delicate hands. He dug and dug, thinking.

Either it was another reserprine dream—or he wasn't Hugh Horner.

Then was he the man whom he'd selected—more or less at random? But that wasn't possible, for the man in question had been in the *Bodies, Inc.* establishment on Long Island—unless, somehow, that had merely been a projected image of the man, like three-dimensional television. Then . . . where was he?

"Want me to take over, Lonnie?" demanded the harsh whisper. For the first time, Horner realized that it was not close by. It was a loud whisper and it came from a considerable ways off. Wanting time to think, Horner said, "Yes. All right."

He backed out of the tunnel slowly, awkwardly, his

body stiff. Stiff, but not painful. Hugh Horner's limbs would have ached terribly in this cramped position, but Lonnie's did not. Lonnie scurried more rapidly now—backwards and not minding it at all—out of the tunnel. The walls of the tunnel, Horner observed, were of bare soft earth. If his elbows or knees struck them, some of the earth sifted down, and sometimes a rock. He had the sudden impression that the tunnel had been dug over a considerable period of time with crude implements or by hand.

Finally, Horner emerged into a small square room. There were two bunks, one over the other, he observed as he stood up. The walls were bare plaster. There was a sink and a lidless toilet. There was a small mirror. Only three of the walls were plaster. The fourth consisted of a grim row of vertical bars.

He was in a prison cell.

He gazed about wildly. He wanted to scream. He didn't understand how this could be, but understanding was decidedly secondary. He looked at his bloody hands. It was his own blood—Lonnie's, that is—but it was symbolic to him. A man was sitting on the edge of one of the bunks, smoking. He was watching Horner. He was a short man with immense shoulders. He wore gray denim and Horner did not have to be told it was a prison uniform or that his clothing was identical.

Somehow, Horner had traded places—identities!—with a convict.

"'Samatter, Lonnie? What you staring at?"

"Nothing. Nothing, I guess." Horner went on staring. The other man's name was Jake, he knew that all at once. He knew other things. Other memories came flooding back . . . not his memories. Lonnie's. Because he was Lonnie now. His mind was numb. Numb. He was Lonnie—Lionel Overman—and he was in jail on a twenty-to-life rap. His behavior, the river of memory told him, had not been exemplary. It would not be twenty years. It would be life.

"What—what am I in for?" he demanded in a soft voice, for that particular memory would not come.

"You're kidding," the man named Jake said.

Horner went over to him and grabbed his denim shirt

with dirt-and-blood-caked hands. "I asked, what am I in for?"

"Hey, take it easy," Jake growled. "Don't get yourself in an uproar. We got other things to think about."

"Tell me," Horner said grimly.

Jake looked at him. Jake had the widest shoulders Horner had ever seen. Probably, Jake was incredibly strong. But his shoulders shrugged and he said, "When you get like that, Lonnie, I guess you got to have your way." He added one word. He added, "Murder."

"Murder," Horner said slowly.

"Hell, yeah, murder. Now snap out of it, will you?"

"Murder. Why didn't they electrocute me?"

"You was young at the time. Twenty, I think. Hey, what's the matter with you? Will you leave go the shirt so I can go down there?"

"Yes," Horner said. "Yes, of course." There was more on the river of memory now. There was Jake. And Lonnie Overman—Horner. And a man named Forbish, another convict. For eighteen months they had been digging.

Digging.

The entrance of their tunnel was concealed behind the toilet. For eighteen months they had kept a model cell and inspections had been only cursory. Eighteen long months.

And tonight, according to the missing Forbish's calculations, they were ready to strike paydirt. Which, naturally, would make Forbish very bitter. Because now he wasn't with them. Forbish had been transferred to another cell-block when the three-man cells had been converted to two-man cells. Forbish was a bitter, brooding fellow to begin with. Forbish might be bitter enough to spill everything.

"... Don't forget," Jake was saying. "We're close enough now. Forbish knew what he was talking about. I hope to hell you can swim, Lonnie."

"I can swim."

"On account of the tunnel lets out near the river, remember? So, don't forget. The guards come now, it'll probably be on account of Forbish told them. The guards come now, don't bother giving me the signal. Just come crawling in and we'll try to bust through. It got to be no more than inches now. Ain't that right?"

Horner said it was right. Forbish, now departed, had been their tunnel expert. The whole plan had been Forbish's, and now Forbish was deprived of it. There was no telling what the bitter Forbish might do.

"Well, wish me luck, kid."

"Good luck," Horner said dutifully. Jake got down on hands and knees and squirmed down behind the toilet and soon disappeared into the tunnel.

Horner wanted to think. Desperately he wanted to think. But now his stunned mind was a blank. The thoughts would not come. He sat there, all but mindless.

And heard footsteps.

He shut his eyes. The bunk was hard, but not too hard. If he shut his eyes and tried to think very hard of Hugh Horner and Hugh Horner's life, pretty soon he would wake up and the nightmare would be over.

He shuddered. He was only fooling himself, he knew. This was no reserprine dream. This was—incredibly—the real thing.

He heard footsteps.

He stood up, adrenalin coursing through his veins and making him feel vital and alive and ready for anything. Footsteps meant the guard was coming, but the gray light streaming in through the window told Horner that it was barely dawn and there would be no reason for a guard to come so purposefully in this direction unless Forbish had squealed. So, if the guard came now, which seemed likely, the guard would come seeking their tunnel.

Lonnie's and Jake's—not Horner's. Horner had had nothing to do with it. No. Certainly not.

But Horner was going to serve Lonnie Overman's life-term in prison—for murder. And Horner would be punished for the attempted escape. Punishment? He was already serving a life-term. Solitary-confinement, probably. He was innocent. He had done nothing, except wish for youth. It wasn't fair, he told himself. It was terribly, tragically unfair. He wanted his freedom.

"Hey you, Overman," the guard said. He stood outside the cell, holding the bars. "I can't see so good in there. Where's Hanrohan?"

Hanrohan was Jake. "Sleeping," Horner said.

The guard scowled and squinted. "Bunk looks like it's empty," he said.

"The top bunk," said Horner.

"Can't see the top bunk," said the guard. He searched for his keys, inserting the right one, turning the big tumblers.

Horner tensed. He had committed no murder. He had done nothing. He was no criminal. He wanted his freedom but could not tell them, by the way, I'm not who you think I am, I'm a fellow named Hugh Horner and I never committed anything worse than a traffic violation in my life, so please get me the hell out of here and give me back my old body, it's all right, I don't mind being forty-seven years old. He could tell them nothing like that. He could only do what Lonnie Overman was trying to do, and try to do something later about this unexpected p l a c e-changing with a convicted lifer.

He could only try to escape.

The heavy bars swung in, all but soundless on oiled hinges. The guard swaggered into the cell, expecting nothing. He walked to the bunks, peered at the upper one.

He reached for the whistle, lanyard-dangling from his neck. He got it in his mouth and blew on it. It was the loudest sound Horner had ever heard.

A second later, Horner grabbed the guard's shoulder and swung him around and hit him.

Horner felt the numbness and pain of it to his elbow, but it had been a good blow. Lonnie knew how to use his fists. The guard went down and stayed down and Horner wondered how much time they would have until the whistle brought help.

He scurried to the toilet and got down on hands and knees behind it, crawling into their tunnel.

"Forbish must have talked already," he called out, making his way on hands and knees through the pitch-dark tunnel. The shaft was barely wide enough to admit him and angled sharply several times where Overman, Jake Halrohan and Forbish must have encountered large rocks.

Horner estimated the distance at fifty feet or more before he came up against Jake's back. He had expected complete darkness here at the nether end of the tunnel, but faint light seeped in from somewhere.

"Made it!" Jake cried hoarsely. "Listen to the river."

Horner heard it, a faint rushing of water. "The guards," he said. "I took care of one, but not before he blew his whistle. We don't have much time."

There was not enough room for both of them to dig. Horner waited on hands and knees while Jake clawed at the earth again with his fingers. Soon Horner heard a pounding sound and realized Jake was using his fists to enlarge the hole in the soft mucky ground.

"I'm squeezing through!" Jake finally cried, and Horner felt the man's bulk ahead of him shift over to one side and then forward. A moment later, Horner felt cool fresh air caress his cheek. He had not realized how close and fetid it was in the tunnel until now. He sobbed, breathing deeply of the night air. A wind stirred, and hard rain pelted his face. For a few tormenting seconds his shoulders became wedged in the opening, then he was through. Suddenly there was no footing and he rolled over and over down a steep embankment, taking loose earth and stones with him. He came to rest very close to the river. The water sounds were much closer now.

"We made it, bucko," Jake said in a low, jubilant voice. "We made it."

Just then a siren wailed above them and the night gloom was punctuated by a quick-swinging searchbeam. Horner looked up quickly, knew the light would never spot them down here because of the hill. But the tunnel was something else again. Armed guards could be expected through the tunnel momentarily.

"Do we wait, or beat it?" Jake said hoarsely.

"What do you think?" Horner called over his shoulder as he got up and bounded down to the river. The bank was steep here; he took four splashing strides and had to swim. The water was icy, the current swift. Horner took a look over his shoulder, saw Jake wading more gingerly into the water as the mouth of the tunnel suddenly erupted in a bright flash of light that illuminated everything.

"Stop or we'll shoot!" a voice cried, and Horner let the current take him, his head twisted back so he could see. Jake, the fool, had not yet allowed the water to take him. He was still standing, still floundering uncertainly in the shallows, when the flashlight beam at the

mouth of the tunnel caught and held him.

"Stand perfectly still, you!"

Jake shouted a curse and splashed into deeper water.

He did not get far enough to swim. There were three explosive sounds and three flashes of light brighter than the searchlight and Jake threw his hands into the air, spun completely around and staggered back toward the embankment. Shuddering in the cold, Horner kicked easily with his legs. He'd already removed his shoes. He was careful that his kicking did not break the surface. He changed to a safe underwater scissor and a breaststroke, swimming silently, unseen. He was an innocent man in a killer's body, but could never prove that. He had to get away.

"There were two of them," a voice called behind him.

And another, louder: "You out there! Stop or we'll shoot!"

It was meant to scare him: they couldn't possibly see him. Nevertheless, Horner's heart almost stopped when he heard a volley of shots. Then, in the silence that followed, he felt a momentary sorrow for Jake Halrohan, who was either dead or a prisoner again. But his case and Halrohan's were different—Halrohan had been duly convicted for some crime; Horner was innocent.

He swam, and grew gradually numb with cold. He became aware of a stronger current, surrendered himself to it and was borne along. The voices had faded behind him; there had been only the first volley of fire, then silence. He could not judge how far he had gone, nor did he know the geography in the vicinity of the state prison. In all probability there would be a three-state alarm out for Lionel Overman—which now meant for Horner. He had to hurry.

The first false light of predawn had faded. It was as dark now as the middle of the night, but in half an hour daylight would come. Rain fell in fitful squalls now; the rain seemed to be stopping. Horner had never been so cold in his life. He thought hours had passed, but knew that was impossible because dawn had not yet chased the night. He shivered and broke for shore in an agonizingly slow crawl. He dragged himself out of the water and lay there, gasping, panting, still shivering. After a while he

got up. The sullen sky seemed brighter across the river now; dawn was coming. He had to get away. He had to get out of his tell-tale prison denims before it was fully light or he would never get out of them at all.

Very faintly he heard the wail of the prison siren. Slowly he walked up the muddy embankment, then set out in a southerly direction. The rain came down harder now, as if determined to make things as miserable for Horner as it could. He came to a fence. It was barbed wire and it meant people weren't far. He decided to climb the fence, parting the top two strands and going through. He found himself in a pasture. Something big and blocky loomed ahead—a barn. At least he could sleep there for a few hours. He would be comparatively safe if he could find a place up in the loft somewhere, but of course that would be delaying the inevitable, for if he waited till night he would still be within siren distance of the state prison.

He lifted the lock bar cautiously and let the big barn door swing out. There was a faint protest of rusted metal and Horner allowed a full two minutes to pass before he went inside. The cattle smell was strong. A cow lowed uncertainly off to his left, but he could see nothing. He passed a smaller door, not meant for cattle, and the smaller door was not locked. He smiled as it swung on its rusty hinges in the rain and the wind. If anyone was about, that would explain the other hinge noise. Meanwhile, Horner was ravenously hungry. He would eat anything, even cattlefeed... He stumbled suddenly, reaching out awkwardly to right himself. A bucket clanged against wood, and he froze.

Then, not ten feet above Horner's head, a sleepy girl's voice said, "Go back to sleep, will you, Caleb honey? It wasn't nothin'."

"I heard someone down there."

"It wasn't nothin', Caleb honey," the girl repeated. "One of the cows kicked inter somethin', is all. Put your arm back around me Caleb love, there Caleb, ah Caleb."

"I still thought I—"

"Caleb. I swear, boy, what is the matter with you! My old man will be up an' to the barn a few minutes fum now an' all you can do is talk. Caleb Wilson if you don't... ah..."

The gloom inside the barn was less complete than it had been outside, only moments ago. Rain drummed on the roof as Horner groped slowly forward, found the foot of a ladder which probably went up to the loft. The boy named Caleb and the farm girl were up there and, from the tone of their conversation, probably undressed. Horner needed Caleb's clothing. He wondered for a moment if it would be telltale farm clothing, a pair of jeans and a flannel shirt, perhaps. He couldn't get very far in New York with that, not when an alarm was out for an escaped convict. But if Caleb had come a-courting in his Sunday best...

The sounds above his head made Horner blush furiously as he mounted the ladder one slow rung at a time. The wood creaked and Horner froze, but the sounds of love did not abate. Horner could see blacks and grays now, charcoals—but no pale grays and whites of day.

Suddenly, he was in the loft. He stood there, wanting to breathe hard but barely daring to breathe at all. From the sound of *their* breathing, Caleb and the girl had abandoned themselves completely. Hay crunched underfoot, and Horner froze in his tracks, crouched there. But Caleb and the girl were beyond hearing. He could not see them: he was very glad that this was so. His sense of privacy had already been violated in a shocking fashion, both from their point of view and from his.

They made animal sounds. Blood flooded Horner's face again. The hell with it, he finally decided. They sounded happy enough, at any event. He got down on hands and knees and groped for Caleb's clothing.

With one hand he found the clothing. With the other he struck something warm and slightly yielding. Again, he froze.

"Caleb! How'd you get down there?"

"Down where?"

"My foot."

"I ain't down there."

"Caleb!" The foot explored Horner's arm, his shoulder. The foot drew away as if Horner were flame. "Caleb," the voice was shocked. "Caleb, I think it's somebody."

There was a gasp, a stirring, a creaking of wood and a crunching of hay. Horner remained in a motionless crouch, one hand still grip-

ping the pile of clothing. He was aware of a dim shape as Caleb got up. He wondered if Caleb could see him crouched there and decided that for the moment he could not.

When Caleb was very close, when he would have stepped on Horner had he advanced another two strides, Horner flung the pile of clothes in his face and propelled himself forward headfirst. His head struck Caleb's belly as he hoped it would and the air rushed out of Caleb and the farmboy did a jackknife over Horner's shoulder. Horner backed away quickly and hit Caleb as he went down. He was not happy about that, but he had to make sure. He connected twice with Caleb's face.

"Daddy!" the girl demanded in a choking sob. It was half question and half frightened guess. She didn't raise her voice, though. And she would not raise her voice, on the chance that it was not Daddy and Daddy, maybe, would not hear. Because she was as much afraid of Daddy finding her here with Caleb as she was afraid of Horner.

"Just be quiet and you won't get hurt," Horner whispered.

"Who are you?"

Instead of answering, Horner commenced stripping off his prison denims. He changed into Caleb's clothing while the girl administered to her lover, stroking him and cooing at him in the growing light. Horner could see the clothing now: it was shirt and loud tie and farm-catalogue suit and while Horner never would have picked these particular items for himself out of choice, they would get by in New York without too many second glances.

"Got a car?" Horner asked.

"Daddy has a—"

"I mean Caleb."

"Y-yes, sir. He come in a pick-up truck."

"Where are the keys?" Horner asked.

"But you ain't a-takin'—"

"Where are the keys?"

"You're wearin' them in your left-hand pocket, I think."

Horner checked the pocket. The keys were there.

"Where's the truck?" he asked.

"Round behind the barn. You take the lane there over to the fence. On t' other side of the fence, but it's Caleb's uncle's truck, mister. I swear, he'll tan Caleb's hide if you—"

"Well," said Horner

righteously, and then felt foolish, "he ought to."

Then he heard Caleb sighing, knew the boy would be all right. He also knew that he would be safe in the pick-up truck for at least an hour or so. For the girl wouldn't dare tell her father, at dawn, coming from the barn, that Caleb's pick-up truck had been stolen. And even Caleb had a problem. Apparently it was some distance back to his uncle's farm—and there was still the problem of accounting for his absence in the night.

Horner went down the ladder quickly, and out of the barn. It was still raining outside, but dawn light had finally come. Abruptly, Horner flattened himself against the wall of the barn. He'd heard something. Footsteps squelching t h r o u g h the mucky pasture. A big burly man went by and Horner waited ten seconds before he dared to move again. Then he found the lane behind the barn and marched along through the mud until he reached the three strands of the barbed wire fence, parted them and went through. He had come several hundred yards and now saw the truck ahead of him. He wondered if he dared start the engine with the farmer so close. He decided he had to chance it, swinging up into the truck and inserting the key in the ignition.

Moments later, he was driving through the rain. The lane took him to a two-lane blacktop which led to a concrete highway heading south for the city. Grimly, Horner clung to the wheel. It was still quite early and almost no traffic was on the road. Horner expected pursuit almost momentarily.

Miraculously, he was in Brooklyn. He still couldn't believe it. He had driven the pick-up truck down through the rain to the northern outskirts of the Bronx, where he'd parked it near a subway station. A series of subway rides had brought him through the Bronx and Manhattan to Brooklyn, where he lived with Jane. He thought his trail was covered quite well. There was something hearteningly a n o n y m o u s about a subway passenger.

The rain had stopped. The time, on a bank clock, was quarter past eleven. The bank was around the corner from where the Hugh Horners lived. Horner's steps became swifter: he had already decided to see his

wife. Jane must have been frantic, he told himself. Naturally, Horner couldn't just barge in on a wife now apparently twice his age and announce himself. In the first place, she wouldn't believe him. In the second, there would be the element of shock. In the third, he was still wanted by the police—as Lonnie Overman.

Horner shrugged. He would *have to* barge in on her. He had to get off the streets, or sooner or later he would be spotted as the escaped convict. Every couple married twenty years, and moderately happy, Horner told himself, had certain shared secrets. Given time and the opportunity, he could prove his identity to Jane beyond the shadow of a doubt, new body or not.

He reached their apartment building and went into the lobby. He stood there longer than was necessary, for the self-service elevator had already come down. He studied his reflection in the lobby mirror. The clothing was a pretty good fit, but the suit was a cheap sharkskin in a loud plaid, and the tie was a clashing polka-dotted affair. You look just great, Horner told his reflection. But he had to admit he was not really sorry. He was young again, strong and healthy, and not bad looking in a dashing, devil-may-care way. Despite Lonnie Overman's troubles, the face was one used to smiling. Horner could see that. It was a strong-looking face and the eyes, which Horner had expected to be furtive, were frank and bold. The furtive look, then, belonged to Overman's personality and Overman's personality no longer inhabited Overman's body.

Whatever happened, Horner was suddenly determined to keep this good, sound, healthy body. A lifer in prison, Overman did not need it. Whereas Horner . . .

He shut the thoughts off. There was no predicting the future, no sense raising his hopes, only to have them dashed, sundered, when the law overtook him. He entered the elevator, went up to the fourth floor, walked uncertainly along the hallway. Suddenly, he was frightened. Could he explain the situation to Jane? It hardly seemed likely. It was asking a lot of anyone. How could Jane believe the wild story he would tell her? How could he . . . ?

Horner shrugged, and jab-

bed a finger against the bell-button. He waited a few seconds, hearing no response inside the apartment. Perhaps Jane was out. Perhaps, even now, she was down at the police station, tearfully describing Horner to the policemen on duty. "But officer, I can't imagine *what* could have happened to him. He was always so punctual..." All at once the door opened.

Standing there staring at Horner was—Hugh Horner!

Horner's first impulse was to run. What could he explain to Jane now? Whatever he tried was doomed to failure by the simple presence of the other Hugh Horner—of the convict, Lionel Overman, in Horner's body, he now realized. He should have expected it. Overman and the other seven men in the observation room, the auburn-haired girl had said at *Bodies, Inc.*, had approved of the switch. It was a question of money, the girl had said. And now Horner knew that was a lie. It had to be a lie. It wasn't a question of money at all. Lionel Overman was a convict. And the others? Convicts too, Horner decided. Glad to trade twenty years of their lives for freedom... Apparently they had been recruited in prison by hirelings of *Bodies, Inc.* Apparently they knew the full score. Lionel Overman—in Horner's body—seemed quite sure of himself.

"Good God!" Horner blurted. "You're me! You have my body—Horner's that is!"

"Quiet, you fool," the other Hugh Horner told him. "The old lady'll hear you. I'll give you this much of a break: get lost and I won't call the cops. But beat it—fast!"

"Now listen—" Horner began. His voice trailed off. He had nothing to say. He understood, but he was stunned. Intellectual understanding and emotional acceptance of a situation, he knew, having learned the hard way, were two different things. But he studied Lionel Overman in Hugh Horner's body, and was more determined than ever that he would not go back, if going back were possible. The Hugh Horner he looked at was an ageing man. Forty-seven? He looked easily that old. He was a dumpy man with a sagging-jowled face, small, rather close-set eyes and a receding hair line. The eyes looked crafty, too: Horner had never known his eyes to look crafty before. Probably, that was Over-

man's personality coming through.

"You listen to me," Overman said, "and listen good. Get lost. I mean that brother. We both know the score, so don't try to pull any of this bewilderment crap on me. I heard over the radio how you escaped, but hell, man, they got a seven state alarm out for you. I got enough trouble with that bag of an old lady inside—"

"What," said Horner in a shocked voice, "did you say?"

"I got enough trouble with your bag of a wife, I said," Overman told him. "Hell, man, maybe my body's older now, but my memory ain't. She's a bag. A real bag. But what do you care, huh? You ain't saddled with her any more."

"Saddled with her?" Horner mumbled. "Saddled? I—I love my wife. How dare you call her a—a—" Horner went livid with rage, grabbed Overman's arm.

The small dumpy man lurched toward him. "Hey, leggo—" Overman struck out awkwardly, unathletically, in the Hugh Horner body. Horner warded off the weak blows easily, and hit Overman once, expertly, on the point of the jaw just as Jane Horner called from within the apartment:

"Who is it, dear? What's taking so long?"

Horner let the unconscious Overman fall. He was about to flee back to the elevator because he couldn't face his wife now, not—apparently—as the man who had just knocked Hugh Horner unconscious. But an apartment door between theirs and the elevator opened and Horner had no choice but to duck into his own apartment.

Jane appeared from the direction of the kitchen. She was wearing an apron and she was dumpier than Horner remembered. Probably, Horner told himself, my own dumpiness prevented me from seeing her that way. She wore her hair in a bun and was forty-five and looked it. She was holding a heavy green-glass pitcher in her hand and looked down at what was apparently her unconscious husband on the floor and let out a scream—or began to, for Horner ran to her and clasped a hand over her mouth.

"I can explain everything," he said, wondering if, indeed, he could. "If you promise not to shout or scream, I'll let go of you."

The trapped face nodded.

Horner let go and his wife said, "I know you. I know you now. I recognize you from the television. You're that Lionel Overstreet—"

"Overman—but I'm not."

"Who escaped from the prison up state. What—what did you do to my husband?"

"I," said Horner, "am your husband."

She looked at him. She looked at the Hugh Horner body, unconscious, on the floor. She sobbed hysterically and Horner said:

"You're both coming with me, in your car."

"A murderer! You'll kill us."

"Janey, listen to me. That time in Jones Beach before we were married and the top of your bathing suit came off while we were swimming—"

It was something only she and the real Horner would know, but he had waited too long. He had been staring down at the unconscious Lionel Overman while he spoke, and when he looked up it was too late to ward off the green-glass pitcher which Jane was bringing down over his head. It exploded there.

So did the world—for Horner.

There was a buzzing. There was a roaring.

Horner opened his eyes. He was seated on the floor and his arms were bound. So were his legs. He looked across the foyer. Overman-in-Horner was similarly seated, similarly bound.

"You're both driving me crazy," Jane Horner said.

"You call the cops," Overman-in-Horner asked.

"Not yet. I'll give you both a chance. You," she gestured at Overman, "weren't acting yourself since you came home last night. You acted—well—cruel. That's the only way I can describe it."

"Of course he wasn't acting himself," Horner-in-Overman said. "Because he isn't—me."

"That makes sense, don't it?" Overman sneered.

"And you wouldn't say 'don't it,'" Jane told him. "And you," she said to Horner, "when you let go of me I knew I was going to hit you with the pitcher and I couldn't stop it, even when I wanted to when you said that about Jones Beach. We—we were alone, my husband and me. But how could you be my husband? You don't look like him. You — you're young enough to be my—my son."

"Ask him," Horner said, pointing at the bound Over-

man, "ask him about Jones Beach." Horner smiled grimly, waiting. His own memory of Overman's life was only fair, and spotty, and certainly not very good on particular details. Overman's of his would be the same.

"What happened at Jones Beach before we were married?" Jane asked Overman.

"Twenty years ago?" How the hell should I remember?"

"*He* remembered," said Jane in a bewildered voice, pointing at Horner.

"Ask him about our honeymoon," Horner suggested.

"Where did we go on our honeymoon?"

"Er, Atlantic City," Overman-in-Horner said triumphantly.

"How long did we stay?"

"Two weeks."

"Who," Jane asked, "was in the hotel room next door?"

"Who remembers a thing like that?" Overman said after a while.

Horner grinned. "I do," he said, and named some old friends of theirs.

Jane made no comment, but asked other questions. They became increasingly intimate, and Overman could not answer most of them. But Horner, of course, answered them all.

Finally, Jane said, "I—I don't know how it can be." Her eyes were filling with tears as she looked down at Overman. "You—you're my husband. You should be. But you don't know the things he would know. It's impossible, but you're not—not—"

Her voice trailed off. She turned to Horner. "While you—you're just a boy. You don't look anything like my husband, but you know all the things he knows."

Quickly, Horner told her. Overman tried to confound the incredible story with acid comments on its impossibility, but Jane heard Horner's words and, when he had finished, she went to him slowly and untied him. She looked at him and said, also slowly, "You—you're my husband. I know you are. I know it now. But you're young. I can't keep you, saddled—"

"That's just what he said," Horner said.

"But you'll want your freedom, won't you?"

"Hell," said Horner, "no. I have a better idea. Bring the car around, Janey. We have a lot to do."

"But this man who looks like—"

"He comes with us," Horner said. He chafed his wrists and ankles and went inside

quickly and soon returned with a Luger pistol, a memento of his Army days in Germany during the Second World War. "Get up," he told Overman, then realized he could not. "Untie him," he told Jane.

She did so. Overman got slowly to his feet. "Try anything and you'll regret it," Horner said. "Don't go for the car, Janey. We'll all three go for it together, Overman in the middle."

Horner rammed the Luger into his jacket pocket and took hold of Overman's arm, steering him for the door. They went into the hall together, and into the elevator. Jane flanked Overman nervously on the other side. The elevator was not empty. A couple named Shapiro from the sixth floor was in it and Jane smiled at them. Horner jabbed the Luger against Overman's ribs and Overman gave them a weak smile too. Horner nodded at them in a friendly fashion.

Then they were all outside, and the Shapiros went their way. "The car?" Horner asked his wife. "Where is it?"

"Down the block," she said, and they began walking. Horner's grip on Overman's arm was like iron. He was much stronger than the little middle-aged man, and both of them knew it. But Overman was desperate, and they both knew that too.

They got into the car. "You drive," Horner told his wife. Overman sat between them and Horner told Jane to head out to Long Island. It would be a long drive and Horner knew he would have to watch Overman every mile of the way.

An hour later Horner said, "Turn there." He was surprised that he remembered the way. It had all seemed dream-like in the taxi.

"What are you gonna do?" Overman asked. "Try and change back, that it?"

Horner shrugged. Actually, he did not know. He was playing the rest of it by ear, but if there was an answer anywhere, it would be at *Bodies, Inc.* He did not answer Overman, but told Jane to ignore the no vehicles sign and drive up the lane alongside the high hemlock hedge.

They all got out of the car together. Horner took the Luger from his pocket now. There was no need to hide it, no reason to take chances. He lifted the door-knocker and let it fall and in a moment the beautiful auburn-haired girl opened the door.

"Yes?" she said, then snapped, "You! You had no business coming back here!"

"It wasn't my idea," Overman said with a bleak grin.

"It was mine," Horner told her. "You didn't say I'd be switching places with a convict. How many other poor suckers fell for it?"

"That's no business of yours. We didn't do a thing that wasn't legal."

"There are no statutes in the books to cover what you did, you mean," Horner accused.

"It's the same thing. Now go away, will you? There's nothing we can do for you here."

"I guess there is," Horner said wearily. "I'll tell you. I guess I'll have to ask you to change us back."

He didn't like the idea. He wanted to be young. He thought after what had happened, and since Overman apparently knew the score, he had earned his right to keep the strong young body as his own. But there seemed no other way out and, besides, he knew now that he loved Jane deeply and could not show her the kind of love he wanted to, young enough to be her son. He would change back with regrets, but change he would. The dream of youth had ended for him....

The pretty auburn-haired girl was laughing. "But I thought you knew," she said with finality. "We can't possibly reverse the procedure. Once made, the change is irrevocable because the electromagnetic impulses which make up a human mind are delicate and could never stand the shock twice. It looks like you're trapped, Mr. Horner. Or, should I say, Mr. Overman?"

Momentarily, he was stunned. He looked at Jane. Jane's face was crumpling. She was going to cry. A dumpy, middle-aged woman on the brink of tears.

He whirled — too late! Overman was in the soft and dumpy Horner body, but Overman's reflexes had apparently crossed over with him. He lunged for the Luger just as Horner brought himself out of the momentary funk which possessed him. The Luger was wrenched from Horner's hand. It seemed to leap into Overman's with a life of its own, then Overman swung it up and down and Horner felt the searing pain of it against his temple. He staggered and would have fallen, but Jane

came to him, supported his weight until, slowly, strength flowed back.

"Go inside and call the cops," Overman snapped at the girl. "This guy can't prove nothin'. Let the dame rant if she wants, they'll think she's nuts and I'll wind up with a separation. Snap to it, baby!"

"Don't worry," auburn-hair said, "I will." And she disappeared inside.

"Hugh, oh, Hugh," Jane said. "What will we do?"

"You'll just wait for the cops," Overman told them. He held the Luger on them steadily, watching them very closely.

Horner said, "I'm sorry, Overman. It isn't loaded."

Overman grinned at him, a wolfish grin. "Sure," he said, "that's why you held it on me all the way out here."

"But I knew, and you didn't. That makes a difference, doesn't it? Don't you see, it wouldn't be loaded. It's only a war souvenir. You're not supposed to keep war souvenirs loaded. Well, are you?"

Overman looked uncertainly at the weapon, then at Horner. He got a fingernail under the edge of the ammo clip in the butt and was about to spring it when he said, "You're bigger'n me. If it ain't loaded, why don't you—"

Horner cried, "I'm going to!" and leaped at Overman. The gun bucked between them, went off. Horner felt the heat of the slug's passage in the air, then was grappling with Overman. The smaller man brought his knee up and a wave of nausea engulfed Horner. He clung to Overman, waiting for it to pass, keeping the Luger out of reach by holding Overman's wrist up over his head.

Overman's knee blurred up again, but this time Horner pivoted and caught it on his thigh. He lashed out with his free hand, striking Overman with all his might across the face, open-handed. Overman staggered back, stunned. Horner followed through with a short left hook, and the fight was over.

"I just phoned the police," auburn-hair said, coming out. "I—wha—"

"Stand still," said Horner. "Better yet, let's go inside." He turned to his wife. "Listen, Jane. The cops. I'll have to run. There's no way of proving—well, you know. But I want you to come with me. I love you."

"I couldn't go with you.

Like this. Twice your age. I—"

"I don't want you to. You like this girl's looks? She's very pretty—"

"Now wait a minute!" shrieked auburn-hair.

"You wait. I don't know how many suckers you trapped in convict's bodies. You deserve whatever you get—like, for example, losing twenty years."

Jane said, "But—but what is wrong with growing older the way we're growing older?"

"Nothing," Horner told her quietly, "if we'd allowed ourselves to live. But we didn't. We just existed, always promising to do the things tomorrow—the things we always wanted to do—which somehow we never got around to. If you live, there's nothing wrong with growing old. But we haven't lived. And now, now Jane darling, we have a second chance. Jane—will you?"

She looked at him. There were tears in her eyes. "Yes," she said finally. "Oh, yes, Hugh!"

Horner gave Jane the Luger. "Take her inside," he said. "I'd better get Overman."

The girl said, "You'll never get away with it," as Horner lifted the unconscious Overman to his shoulder and entered the house. "I've already called the police. They're on their way."

"Then we have nothing to lose," Horner said. "If you don't work fast, I'll kill you. You understand?"

She looked at his face, studying him. She began to tremble. "But I don't want to be old!" she wailed.

"And I didn't want to be a convict—and neither did all those other men, whatever prisons they're in now. Get a move on."

There was a room. Two tables and machinery. Jane got on one of the tables, auburn-hair on the other. Auburn-hair was crying softly, bitterly. It was, Horner knew, just retribution. Probably, it was the only retribution ever meted out to her.

"We'll have to run for it, maybe the rest of our lives," Horner told Jane. "You want to?"

"With you? Yes, yes!"

Crying, auburn-hair told him what to do. Distantly, sirens were wailing. Horner activated the switches . . .

He looked at auburn-hair. "Jane?" he said. "Are you Jane?"

She smiled at him radiant-

ly. She was beautiful. "Yes," she said. "Yes, darling."

"At Jones Beach—" he began.

"You got the bra of my bathing suit but wouldn't give it back to me," she said, and flushed.

"O.K., now let's hurry. Outside. The cops are almost here."

"Wait a minute," Jane said. "I have a vague memory. She—she wouldn't tell you . . ."

Jane's body—auburn-hair-in-Jane—was crying bitterly. It sounded as if she would go on crying forever. Overman was still unconscious.

"It's like fingerprints or retinal prints," the new Jane said.

"What is? Hurry up!"

"An electroencephalogram. An E.E.G. Each person's is different. There aren't any mistakes, ever."

"I once had one—in the Army!" Horner cried. "I can prove all of this, as fantastic as it sounds. And there's this machinery."

"We won't have to be fugitives, Hugh!"

"Yes, but," he smiled, "I wanted to see the world. I didn't mind."

"We'll see the world," Jane said, and kissed him. "After you clear yourself."

"And after a few new law books to cover this are written," twenty - five - year - old Hugh Horner said to his beautiful, twenty - year - old wife. They would have a long session with the police, he knew. At first, the police wouldn't believe them. But ultimately, they would have to. He remembered reading about a case in another state, in Wisconsin. Identical twins, never had their fingerprints taken, no identifying marks. One a criminal, the other not. And an E.E.G. proving their identity and accepted in court.

So, eventually, the police would believe them.

And give them a second chance to live their youth the way it should have been lived in the first place.

THE END

Watch for DREAM WORLD!

A new kind of fiction—

On your newsstand soon

They accepted the good fortune and smothered their doubts with a kiss.

THE PINT-SIZE GENIE

By KATE WILHELM

Are things going well with you? Does everything you touch turn to gold? Did you get that fat raise you asked for and is a vice-presidency in the offing? Then for heaven's sake, don't sell your house! At least not until you read this story. You don't own a house? Then rush out and buy one quick! It may be the making of you.

THE couple stood eyeing each other antagonistically as man and woman have done since that first row over the apple. Jac shouted,

"I'm taking it out!"

"And I'll put it back!"

"You will not!"

"Who's going to stop me?"

"Look, honey, be reasonable, you know it's against the law to buy or operate, or possess a pacifier without a government permit. And you know about the only permits issued are for the pleasure houses. The fact that you found it doesn't alter that." Jac forced a smile to show his wife there would be no future recriminations about using the pacifier on her club members in order to lull them into letting her win at bridge. After all, she'd won more in an afternoon than he'd be able to earn in a week's time. "Please, let's get it out and forget all about it."

"No!" Her explosive negative settled the argument as far as she was concerned. She turned her back on him and headed for the house. "And what's more, I might even turn it on when your boss comes tonight. There's no doubt, it will do the trick."

Jac winced at the thought. His boss would be in the house less than a minute before she had him convinced he could raise Jac's salary. That might lead to embarrassing questions later when the effects wore off. His boss was no fool. He'd know he'd been tampered with and he'd investigate. If it were found in their possession they could

both be de-sensitized and sent to the mines of Io.

Suddenly Jac rushed to the utilities wall and wrenched the thing loose from the solar converter. Quickly, before she could interfere he set the time dial on the timevisor and fed the small gadget into the black yawning hole that hadn't yet had time to focus on the time he had chosen. That was tricky business. He had to be fast to catch it just the precise second the desired period began to emerge. A moment too soon and it would merely short out the set. If he jammed it the repairman would find the converter and report it. Too late and the hole was no longer there. Only the 'picture'. And it was impossible to interfere in any way with the past once it had emerged from time. He gave the time dial a full turn before either he or his lovely wife had a chance to see what moment in history he had dialed. He wondered briefly when it was now. Then he had the more immediate problem of his wife's anger to contend with.

Sally and Lester Hunt were surveying their partly finished home a few miles from town. They were inspecting the heating system that had been installed earlier that day. Lester was explaining about the all weather control he'd decided on putting in.

"You see, this way it's all in one unit, with one control and one set of ducts. In the summer time the air conditioner is working and in the winter the furnace. The house will be comfortable at all times. It's the coming thing in this climate."

Sally tried to look interested, but the compact square unit looked just like every other furnace she'd seen so she merely smiled and asked about measurements for her curtains.

"Do you want to go up and measure the living room windows while I get the ones down here?" She handed Lester the extra tape measure she had brought along and he ran up the stairs with it. A moment later she was busy measuring the windows in the basement. She was nearly finished when suddenly while passing near the furnace something dropped near her feet. Startled, she looked around quickly and seeing no one she glanced suspiciously at the furnace. Then she picked up the thing. It was a small box completely enclosed as far as she could tell. The only opening anywhere in it

was where a heavily insulated bunch of wires came from it. The ends of the wires were frayed as if they had broken loose from something or had been pulled loose somehow. It felt incredibly heavy. Sally stood looking at it for a moment, then she shrugged and laid it on top of the heating unit. She made a mental note to tell Lester to speak to the heating contractor about it.

Several weeks later the Hunts moved into their new home. It was the hottest day of the summer and Sally was whole-heartedly wishing the man would come to show them how to connect and operate the air-conditioner. Lester was leaving to make one more inspection of their apartment to make certain they had left nothing behind.

"What if the man comes while you're gone?" Sally called as he got in the car. She wiped her perspiring forehead for the tenth time in the past half hour.

"Let him show you how it works." Lester sounded annoyed at her. "I don't think you'll forget what he says before I come home. And remember to ask him about that box you found."

So she had forgotten to have the water and the electricity turned on; who could remember everything? She slammed the screen door angrily. She'd called both companies earlier and they promised to have someone out that same day. Only they couldn't possibly start the air-conditioner until the others came. Wearily Sally slumped into the nearest chair and closed her eyes to the chaos of the room. Boxes of books, barrels of dishes, trunks of clothes. All must be unpacked.

Sally thought nostalgically of the comforts of their apartment, near the center of town, a bus on the corner, a janitor to see to the trash. And best of all automatic heat in winter and coolness in the summer. She was secretly afraid this venture to the country was a mistake. So far for Lester to drive back and forth to work. So far from her friends, she was sure they'd never come so far just to visit. A knock on the door roused her from her despondency.

"Water company, lady." The man turned the spigots in the kitchen and bath, then he departed for the front yard, first admonishing her, "You watch those faucets to be sure they're off. I'll turn it on from the main." Sally waited a second then remembered the water in the base-

ment. She opened the door so she could hear if it began to run down there.

There was another knock on her kitchen door. This time it was the man for the furnace.

"Oh, I'm certainly glad to see you. I'll show you where the unit is." She gave an anxious glance at the sink, then preceded the man down stairs. "I'm sorry, but our lights aren't on yet. Is it too dark? You can turn it on, can't you?"

"I can get it all set, but you can't start it without electricity." He began looking over the unit using his flashlight.

"I just want you to show me how to operate it, and put that box back on. It fell off from somewhere."

The man examined the box curiously. "Are you sure it fell off this unit?"

"Of course, I'm sure. It nearly hit me when it fell." Then she heard the door again and simultaneously the sound of running water. "Oh, oh! Look, get it fixed, will you? There's the man from the electric company." She ran up the stairs and admitted the electrician and turned off the water from the overflowing bathroom basin. Her head had begun to pound unbearably.

While the electrician and heating man were working she cleaned up the water and then had a cigarette. Her mood was savage by now. Inwardly she was fuming at Lester for being gone when so much was going on. She thought he probably had stopped for a beer in some nice cool bar. She didn't get up to let the workmen out as they finished their jobs, she didn't even speak to them as they called out their goodby's. Then she heard the air-conditioner begin to hum slightly in the basement, and blessedly came the cool air. Almost instantly Sally felt her tension ease, and she leaned back on the couch for a needed ten minute rest, much refreshed in the coolness.

With a start she realized she hadn't asked about the box or about how to operate the conditioner. Then she relaxed once more; somehow it didn't seem so important right now. Evidently the man had managed to put the box where it belonged, and that was the main thing anyway. After a few minutes she began to hum softly to herself, and started to unpack.

When Lester arrived an hour later looking guilty and defensive, she had sandwiches and iced tea on a tray in the

living room. The boxes of books were still there, but the clothes were hung and the dishes put away. Sally's nose was shiny, also her eyes.

"Darling, you must be dead," she held up the frosted glass to him, and patted the sofa beside her. "Here, sit down and don't say a word until you cool off. It must be 100 outside."

Lester merely grunted his reply, but already he had forgotten what he was going to say to what she was going to say about stopping for the beers. He leaned back and closed his eyes, sipping the tea, relishing the peacefullness of the house. Contentedly he sighed and put his arm about Sally's shoulders.

"It's been a tough day for you, kid."

"Not so bad. I'd already forgotten. And we're really home at last. I love this house, I love you, in fact I guess I'm in love with everything right now." They both were surprised at the intensity of her words. Sally looked around the still bare room with the furniture disarranged, the books crated, the walls devoid of pictures and the windows looking stark and naked. She seemed puzzled by something. "Isn't it strange that already it's home and we've not even lived in it yet? I have the feeling that I belong here."

Lester agreed with her that the house made them welcome, and for a while they pondered the fact, then it was forgotten in the joy of just being in their own home. Over the weekend they straightened everything, and on Sunday night it was as if they'd lived there always. They had washed the dishes together and now were sprawled on the living room floor with the Sunday paper. Suddenly Sally threw the paper aside.

"I know what it is!"

"What are you talking about now?" At times Lester had a hard time keeping pace with her conversations.

"What has been puzzling me. Not really worrying me, you understand. In this atmosphere, I couldn't possibly worry. But every now and then I got the persistent feeling that I was missing something. Now I know what it is. That's what I'm talking about. Didn't you ever have that feeling?" She didn't wait for Lester to comment, but rushed on with her words. "It just came to me, the idea, I mean. I want a baby. That's what I'm missing."

The Sunday comics went unread as Lester pulled her to

him. They knew they had never been so much in love before.

The hot summer weeks melted away hazily and were replaced by the brisker moving autumn months. Sally was well on the way to having her wish granted for an heir and namesake. She had never been so contented. Lester, however, seemed to have a troubled mind about something. Although he was happier than he'd ever even dreamed of being. There was something that from time to time stirred restlessly in his brain, begging release. During the week when his work occupied his days and quite often a good part of his nights as well, the thing was silent and he was able to shrug off the feeling, but over the weekends the thing came back. His dreams at night were filled with words, meaningless w o r d s that sometimes were printed on huge sheets of paper or more often just whispered in his ear. He tried hard to hang on to some of them, to extract some sort of meaning from them, but always they were gone, and he was left with the feeling that he'd somehow lost something.

One night late in October they were enjoying the first fire of the season after a busy weekend of entertaining. Sally was preening herself admiringly, feeling her abdomen proudly and gaily daring Lester to say she was getting fat anywhere else.

"Of course, I'll put on a little extra weight all over. But that's natural for some reason. Seems to me the only weight I really need to gain should be for the baby." She squealed suddenly and excitedly cried out. "Lester, it moved! Look, right here! It sort of squirmed!"

Lester laughed delightedly, and carefully drew her to his side and together they waited for the next sign of life.

"I can't get over it, honey. How you've changed." He looked at her face so radiant with joy, more beautiful even than when they were married. "I was a little worried that after you began to get bigger, you'd be sorry."

"Sorry! Why, Lester Hunt, what an idea. I wanted this baby, remember?"

"Now, don't get all indignant at me. After all, you always were pretty vain about that gorgeous figure of yours. And now the bigger you get the more you glory in it." He kissed her forehead lightly. "If I'd known having a baby meant so much to you, I'd

have done something about the situation long before this."

"No, I would have died before, being like this." She frowned slightly then and slowly and thoughtfully she said, "It's all very queer, but I used to be afraid of so many things, and now I'm not. I was afraid of getting pregnant, and afraid that maybe I wouldn't. And I was afraid to quit my job and afraid that I might be fired. I was sure that we'd starve in either event." She grinned impishly at him then and said demurely. "I was even afraid of you."

"And now?" Lester was interested. He'd never guessed this efficient secretary housewife had ever feared anything in her life, least of all him.

"And now I've found peace." She shrugged and said uncertainly, "The how part I don't know. But I think it's all connected with our moving here. It's as if a good psychiatrist erased every doubt and inhibition and frustration completely out of my mind and left it all open to enjoy without fear things I never even noticed before."

Even as she spoke Lester Hunt knew what he had to do. That little gnawing in the back of his brain had suddenly become a voice booming into his consciousness. "Sally, I'm going to quit my job." As easy as that it was done. And then he continued calmly, "I'm going to stay home and write." And the voice was quieted in his mind and the peaceful silence told eloquently that at last he could share Sally's joy in just living as he wished, doing what he wanted without fear.

Sally accepted his decision with the serenity that abided in her these days and soon fell asleep beside him on the sofa. Lester sat unmoving for over an hour staring at the dancing fire on the hearth. He didn't give a thought to the savings account already dwindled to a mere name after the down payment on the house. Nor did the questions of Sally's doctor and hospital bills concern him. He was already deep in the plot of his first novel.

The book and the baby arrived almost simultaneously. Each was a whopping success. The Hunts were fast becoming the most popular people in the town. Sally's dinners and parties were the most successful and her guests the most distinguished. Always it was with an air of regret that they left when the evening

came to its end. Lester's book had a follow up that was even more widely acclaimed. And a year later Sally gave birth to twins. The children were all well adjusted, spirited, cooperative, everything the harassed mother of three youngsters wishes and longs for and as a rule, seldom gets. Sally glowed with an inner beauty that became more evident day by day. And Lester was putting his very soul in words for an avid public. His ever increasing list of published works was taking on a classical significance rarely achieved in such a critical era.

And three quarters of a mile from the Hunt's home a chemical company purchased sixty-four acres of ground to house a new fertilizer plant. This opened the door, so that in fourteen months two other industrial concerns had located their plants within a mile from Lester's and Sally's property. Lester watched this development with anxiety.

"Look, Sally, it's going to change everything in the neighborhood." He pointed to a newly bought map, "Here's our road, the only one leading to those plants from the south end of the city. And there's not a filling station on it, yet. But just wait! First there'll be a modification of the zoning law to permit a gas station, then a grocery, then apartment houses and rooming houses."

Sally sighed in bewilderment. She thought Lester was just being temperamental. She felt a great reluctance within her at the very thought of considering selling the house. She wished they could just remain as they were forever. Always in love, always relaxed, always youthful. Years ago she had come to accept as a proven fact that tensions couldn't exist in their home, and so far her theory had been upheld. Now the thought of leaving seemed almost sacrilegious. As she argued the point with herself she remembered briefly an incident that had occurred when the children were still babies. She and Lester had been out considerably later than they'd planned and they were concerned over the fact that the baby sitter had declared that she couldn't stay past two A.M. An argument had started of its own accord as they were driving home from the party. Conceived in anger and nourished by bitter, recriminating words it had grown out of all proportions with a rapidity that in retrospect was frightening.

By the time the car screeched to a halt in the driveway Sally was beyond speaking to her husband. Angrily she jerked the car door open and gave it a vicious push that slammed it resoundingly as she stamped out. Just as loudly echoed the door on Lester's side. Together they opened the front door of their still fairly new home and immediately they both felt their hostility fade away. Lester stole a sidelong glance at his wife to find her doing the same thing. They laughed and quickly smothered the sound of their mirth for fear of offending the sitter.

She, however, had no rebuke for them. She had discovered one of Lester's books, the third one to be published, and it had so enthralled her that she was dumbfounded at learning the time was half past three.

That was the only violent argument they had in all the years of living in the house. Several times away from home when it appeared a clash was imminent, Sally withdrew her opinions entirely until they were once again in the house. Somehow differences were resolved there with no heated words, and no lasting bitterness that made even a victory a very empty thing.

Sally maintained that the house itself exerted the soothing influence over them as well as their friends. Lester argued that it was they themselves who deserved credit for the atmosphere they created in the house.

"Look," he'd say in his 'let's be reasonable tone', "we love each other tremendously, right? Right! And we have three wonderful kids. Right? R i g h t ! We're financially stable. We're intelligent mature adults who are fortunate enough to boast of excellent physical and mental health. Neither of us has ever needed an analyst, which is more than most of our friends can say. And there you have it. What more could you want to give a house a happy aura?" And there the talk had previously rested. But this time Sally felt a premonition about the conversation, as if it might lead to serious consequences.

"Honey, you're really bothered about it, aren't you?" Lester studied her troubled face for a long moment over the dinner table at the country club where the subject had come up. "Well, I promise you that wherever we live we won't change. We'll be better off in a bigger place, ac-

tually, and the move might help us in other ways, too. We've let ourselves get in a rut here. We should travel abroad and see the South Seas and have a New York penthouse apartment. Do all those crazy things that kids dream of doing when they get rich."

A few days later Lester confided this plan to his friend and lawyer, John Steedley, and before he really had time to consider the effect of his action on Sally, he sold the property to the attorney.

All the way home he felt growing within him a regret over his hasty action. Sally, he knew, would be heartbroken. He needed a drink.

"Mrs. Hunt, are you sure you want this to go through?" Mr. Steedley's expression was grave and troubled. "You know you can still back out. Nothing's final yet. Papers aren't even drawn up."

Sally's eyes were dry. Her psychiatrist had told her to go on and cry occasionally as it would relieve her tension. She gazed over the passing scenery from the automobile. Soon she would again see her house. There it was. Small one floor dwellings flanked it. And a storehouse of some sort was just down the street from it. The house itself was unchanged, only the people.

"Yes, Mr. Steedley. I'm sure."

"Very well then. I'll take you to the office. I just came this way to show you how much everything has changed in the past few years since you and Mr. Hunt moved away. Yes, sir, that was the best investment I ever made, buying your house for rental property. It never stays empty. A Mrs. Grace Wright lives there now. And it's the funniest thing, she discovered she's a real artist. And she must be seventy if she's a day. All at once she just felt like painting, and now she is famous and rich. Guess she'll be moving along one of these days to a fancier neighborhood."

Mr. Steedley sighed and glanced again at the averted face of his client. He thought wonderingly at the speed some people age. He remembered her as looking like a young girl, but now the facial lines and the streaked hair marked her as a rather plain middle-aged woman. He sighed again before he spoke.

"Now for the grounds, you can claim extreme mental cruelty. Drinking and quitting his writing to chase chorus girls like he's doing."

THE END

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